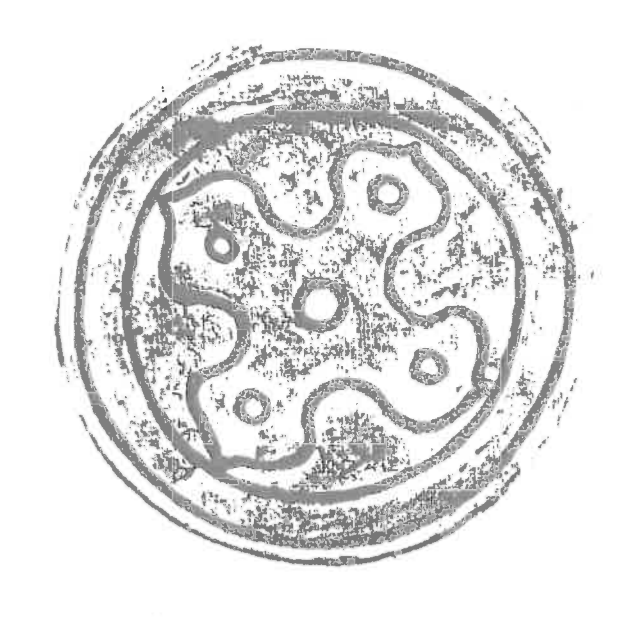
Aspects of Chinese Music



The art of negotiation: teahouse courtship dialogues *(qing-ge)* from Guiyang

Jack Body
assisted by Gong Hong Yu

Transcriptions of vocal polyphony of the Dong, Buyi, Zhuang, Yi, Mulao, Yao and She Minority Nationalities of China.

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The art of negotiation: teahouse courtship dialogues *(qing-ge)* from Guiyang

Jack Body
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These observations are based on recordings made in January and February 1987 by Jack Body and Gong Hong-Yu in Hebing Park, Guiyang, and in teahouses in Guiyang and Huaxi .
The texts of the original recordings were translated and transcribed by Gong Hong-Yu with assistance from Wang Hui-Ying. The published translations were made by Wang Sheng and Huang Dan-Ying

Hebing Gong Yuan, a public park in the City of Guiyang, Guizhou province, has an imposing entrance gate, at the top of a stepped slope which is invariably crowded with street hawkers. A small admission fee is paid and one walks through and up onto the wide main path. Off to the right is a grove where bird fanciers gather. On a quiet day when perhaps the weather is less inviting, the occupants of the park seem to consist only of men carrying their caged songbirds, elderly folk looking for companionship and a gossip and students in search of a park bench where they can sit alone and study their text books. But on a fine day the main attraction of the park is the spontaneous performance of qing-ge (courtship dialogues). Groups of people sit on the grassy slope, clustered around female singers who offer themselves as singing partners. With two or more simultaneous little concerts in progress some onlookers wander back and forth between the groups, stopping to appreciate a particularly skilful singer.

A short distance away stands a pagoda which provides a more formal venue for qing-ge. Here the audience sits on benched seating around the outer wall with singers stepping into the centre of the circle. But since it is the teahouse that is the real home of *qing-ge*, and singers' words sometimes refer to "this tea-house" even when they are sitting in this open pagoda or on the lawn of the park. On days when the crowds are thin and no female singer turns up qing-ge can still be heard across the grass, issuing from a "ghetto blaster" cassette recorder, owned by a man whose consuming enthusiasm prompted him to buy this machine for the express purpose of recording live singing which he could play back on quiet days.

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Walking along the road one would almost certainly miss the building altogether since its roof lies below eye level. A set of steps leads down from the road and into the simple wooden structure of two rooms which is the teahouse. It nestles on the hillside high above the river which runs through the city of Guiyang. Windows stretch along one of the walls, and through them one gazes across the river to the far bank and the city streets beyond. The smaller of the two rooms is at a slightly lower level, and has the feeling of being partitioned off. Here there are games of chess in progress, and the air is alive with the sounds of conversation.

But the main room is where the majority of the patrons are gathered, seated at long tables. The mistress of the house busies herself refilling the tea mugs. Each new customer is expected to buy a mug of tea which remains with him all afternoon: the large tea-leaves release their aroma slowly so that the flavour of the drink seems to mature rather than diminish with each refill from the large hot water pot. The conversation is muted since it is already two o'clock and the afternoon's singing is about to begin. The female singer sits near the window, a woman companion at her side. The clientele are mainly elderly, men and a few women, one with a young child, presumably a grandson. But there are enough younger men present to suggest that this art does more than simply accommodate the dreams of old men.

These teahouse qing-ge require audience participation. They provide an opportunity for any of the male clientele to show off their skills as singers and as entertainers. In a culture where sexually related topics are seldom discussed openly, here an individual can publicly indulge in sexual inuendo and flirtation which in other circumstances would be totally unacceptable.

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In Huaxi, a town twenty kilometres from Guiyang, is another teahouse venue for *qing-ge* performances. It is a single long, dark rather narrow room with a low ceiling and few windows and totally filled with long benches and tables. Crowded with customers it generates a noisy, volatile atmosphere, rather different from the more sedate, open feeling of the Guiyang teahouse.

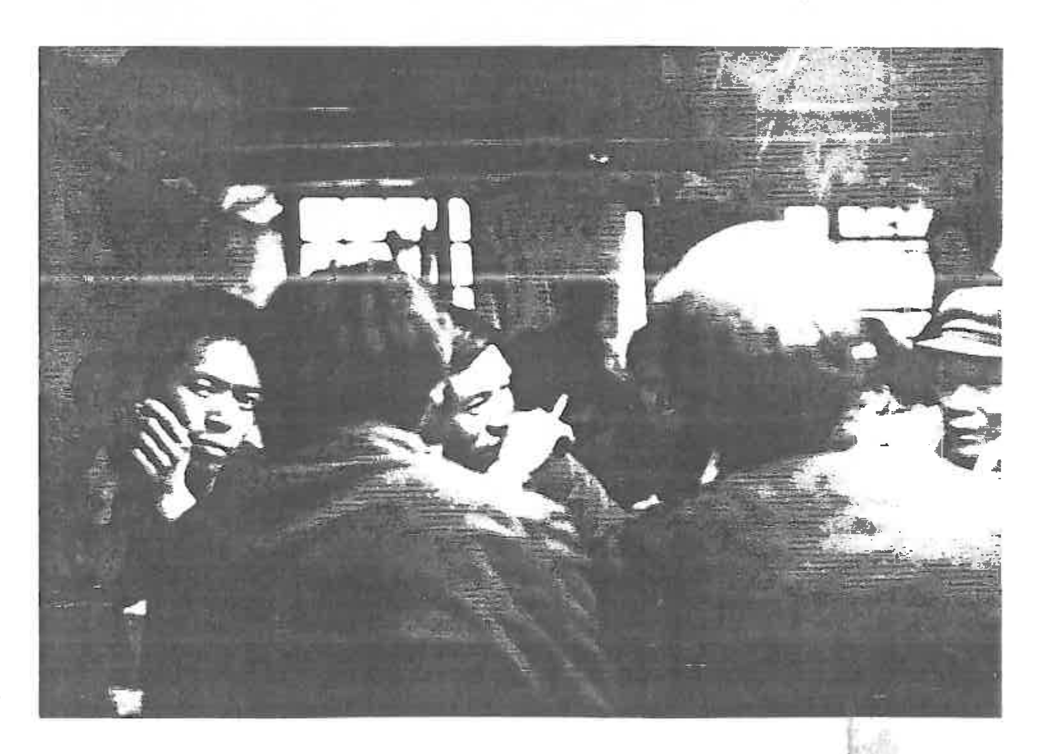
With many clients waiting for a turn to sing, patience wears thin as the singers begin to interrupt each other. Customers call out their disapproval of this or that singer and the teahouse manager steps in to try to restore order. But his shouted admonishments are ignored. It is only when he expresses himself in song and participates in the qing-ge protocol that he is taken notice of. Qing-ge appears to transcend mere speech and pays no regard to it. Questions about who sings and when, and what the content will be are negotiated only through song.

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(Note: although recordings were made in all three of the above venues, the final selection of excerpts, chosen for their contrasted content, does not include material from the Huaxi teahouse.)



Qing-ge enthusiasts in Hebing Park, Guiyang



The crowded Huaxi teahouse.



Female singer, Guiyang teahouse



Male singer, Guiyang teahouse



Three female singers, Hebing Park, Guiyang



Male singer (smoking), Hebing Park

THE ART FORM

Improvised love song dialogues are found in many cultures, particularly throughout Asia. They represent a kind of formalised courtship between young people, allowing girls and boys to meet socially and perhaps establish liaisons. Such courtship qing-ge are known in Chinese cultures, both among the Han and in the Minority cultures.

The qing-ge of the Guiyang teahouse however have different function since most of the participants are mature adults, no longer in search of marriage partners. Here qing-ge is appreciated as a participatory art form and an entertainment, and for the teahouse owner, a strategy for attracting customers.

THE FEMALE SINGER

The female singer in the teahouse is a professional engaged for two or three hours each afternoon, for which she is a paid a percentage of the tea-house's takings. She generally sits against a wall or at the end of the room so she can readily face her singing partners. There are no special positions for the male singers: they sing from wherever they are seated.

THE PROTOCOL

The words are improvised and generally sung to one of two commonly known melodies. A male customer alternates verses with the female singer until he is interrupted by another male. There is no sign when this is about to happen: suddenly there is a third voice joining in from another part of the room. The new singer, however, generally negotiates with the previous male singer, seeking permission to take over, and allowing a transitional exchange between the two men without the participation of the woman. Sometimes the intrusion is resented and the "negotiation" becomes acrimonious. In such cases it is often the female singer who arbitrates, choosing which of the singers she wishes to continue with. The general feeling of the whole room can also influence the outcome, convincing a particularly stubborn singer finally that his continuing is not appreciated.

THE TEXTS

The subject matter and treament is also negotiated between the two singers. While the basic topic is generally courtship, its treatment can be poetic, humorous, teasing, or explicitly erotic. It can take the form of an exchange of compliments about personal attributes or an exploration of idealised love through symbol and metaphor. It can make reference to famous lovers from classical or folk literature, or it can degenerate into irony and ridicule with a humour that is sometimes subtle but more likely downright coarse. It can create scenarios which touch on the problems of common life - poverty, separation, imprisonment - or it can indulge in fast word play whose precise meaning is all but lost.

A good singing voice is secondary to the talent of being able to improvise words with fluency and imagination. Singers must be able to follow on from one another without hesitation, responding quickly to each other's elaboration of the theme, and so develop a coherent dialogue. To relate one verse to another a structural format is sometimes used, such as reference to the twelve months of the year or to the seasons. The flow of song should be uninterrupted and a singer momentarily at a loss for new material may sometimes repeat himself or his partner's previous verse simply to maintain continuity.

THE VERSE STRUCTURE

The basic structure is four lines with seven or more syllables in each line. Nonsense syllables can be used to fill out a line. Sometimes the four line format is expanded, generally by multiples of two lines. Frequently this expansion is the result of an "interpolation" between the second and third lines (see MELODIC STRUCTURE).

THE MELODIC STRUCTURE

From the recordings made it appears that two melodic models are commonly used. These models allow considerable variation to accomodate the words. Individual singers can also introduce their own preferred variations. The cadential formulae at the end of each line remain fairly constant and and it is these which help characterise the melodies.

A new melody may be introduced for the sake of change, or to mark the entry of a new singer or the introduction of a new topic. The two melodies are frequently used in alteration, one by each singer, since their individual characters are complementary.

Of the two basic melodic models type A generally opens with a wide octave sweep while type B is contained within the interval of a 5th (sometimes with an upper auxiliary extending it to a 6th). Type A has a parlando quality with fast "half-beat" movement, while type B is slower and more metrical in feeling. (Ex. 1)

Ex. 1

Type A (see excerpt IV, sixth verse, male singer)

Type B (see excerpt IV, seventh verse, female singer)

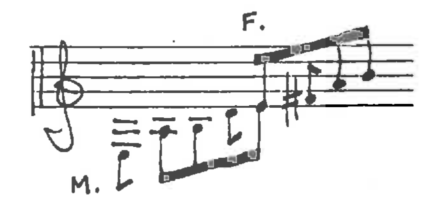
Verses longer than four lines are sometimes achieved by a repetition of the first two melodic phrases. More frequently this expansion of the four phrase format involves a melodic interpolation between the second and third lines. This interpolation is generally strongly measured and melodically static using just three pitches. It can be quite lengthy and generally develops as a comic narrative; the emphasis is on clear rhythmic articulation of the words and there is minimal melodic interest.

THE PITCH RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SINGERS

In the matter of pitch relationship between the voices there is also a process of negotiation, although the singers themselves may not be conscious of it. Men seldom match the range of an octave below the woman's voice. Although sharing the same melody they may choose two unrelated pitch levels which they maintain individually, producing a kind of polytonal antiphony. More commonly, however, the male pitches himself a fifth lower than the female, and their two versions of the same melody will have the appearance of a fugal subject and answer. Men have a preference for a high tessitura and sometimes this means singing at exactly the same pitch level as the female singer. In such cases this requires the use of a different modal configuration to avoid notes beyond the male singer's range.

Generally the most stable pitch relationship between the two voices occurs when their pitch sets interlock, creating complementary parts of a pentatonic mode.

Ex. 2 (as in recorded excerpt III)
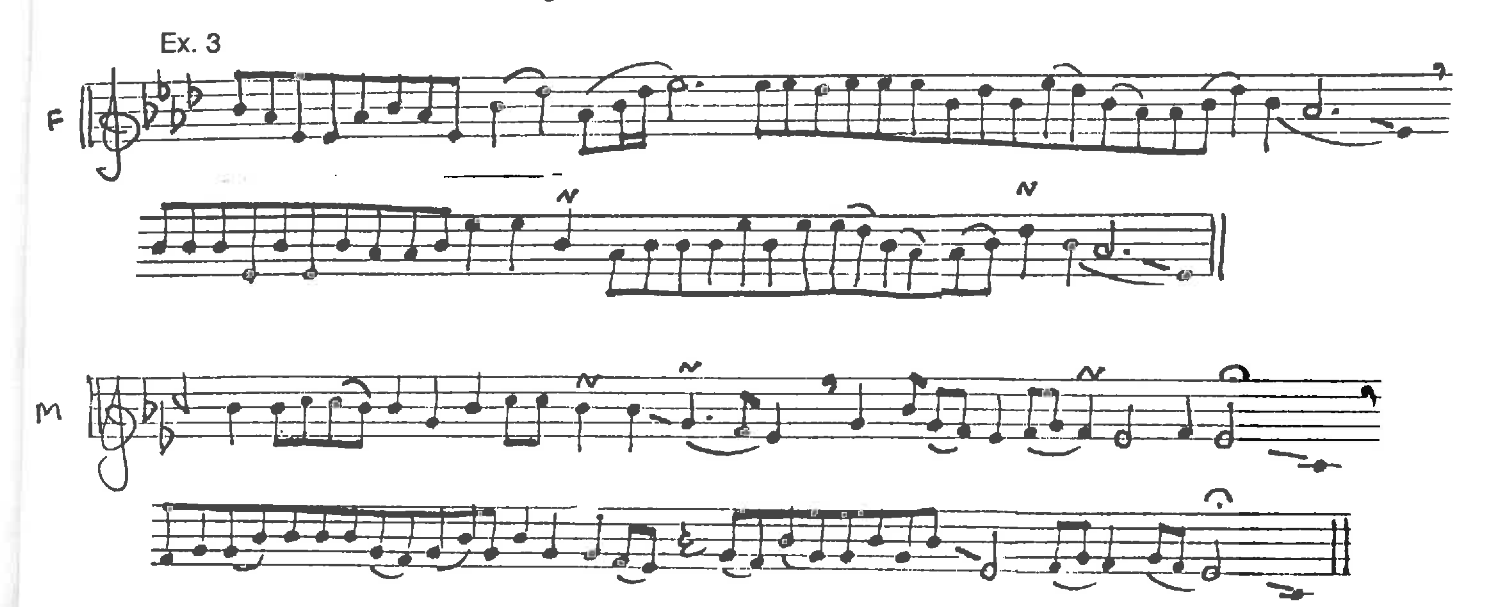


RECORDED EXCERPTS

EXCERPT I

This is a typical exchange, with declarations of love and the pain of separation.

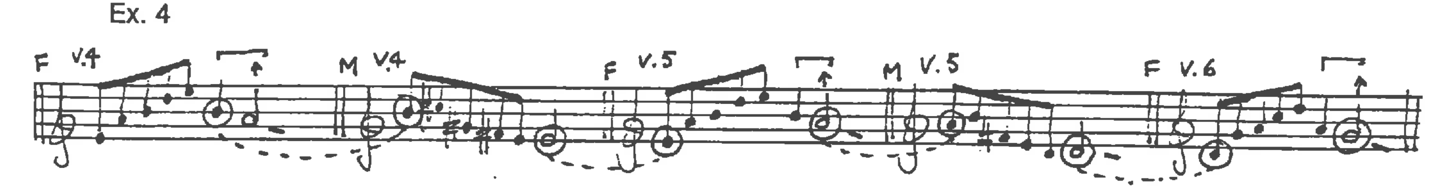
Here the two basic melodic types (refer Ex.1) are used to complement each other: type A is sung by the female, type B by the male (Ex. 3). Both singers also introduce interpolations. Interestingly, the register of the male voice matches that of the lower half of the female's. This means that the man is singing at the very top of his range and the strain he is experiencing can be judged from the noticeable flatness of his 6th degree!

Ex. 3



However both singers gradually raise their pitch level, a tendency perhaps encouraged by the fact that the female's 4th degree is noticeably sharp, particularly at the cadences. At the male singer's fifth entry he changes his pitch relationship with the female, dropping by a tone. The female singer follows at the new pitch level. But the tendency to rise in pitch persists so that within two verses the pitch has risen to what is was previously!

Ex. 4



F Your darling is riding a white horse, crossing a river,
and the horse turns her head, yearning to see her village.
You can't pull a horse without a halter,
and you can't win the heart of a girl if she doesn't fancy you.

M My sweetheart, I'm also riding a white horse, crossing the Yangse river,
and my horse also turned his head yearning for his home town,
He is reluctant to leave his home,
and I hate to leave you, my sweetheart.

F Your darling is riding a white horse, crossing a river,
and the horse turns her head, yearning to see her village.
You can't pull a horse without a halter,
and you can't win the heart of a girl if she doesn't fancy you.

M My sweetheart, your man is riding a white horse down to Guangzhou,
you try to grab the halter and not let me go.
My sweetheart, you are so good to me,
but if you happen to fancy someone else, I will kill him.

F Your darling is riding a white horse down to Guizhou,
looking for a man to sing love songs with.
I can't sing well without your partnering me,
neither can I have much fun without you as a partner.

M My sweetheart, your man is going to be away from home,
he is coming to persuade you to be careful while he is absent.
My sweetheart, you must lock the door and go to bed early,
so that people won't gossip about you.

F My darling, I am listening to your advice. (refer Ex. 4 above)
I came here to the park to sing with you because I was bored.
If I can't sings love songs with you
I suffer as if I am in prison.

M My sweetheart, how time flies! (refer Ex. 4 above)
Let's sing love songs together while we are young
Don't wait till we are old
but let's enjoy ourselves now.

F My darling, I was sent to prison in January.
I always tremble with fear
whenever I think about it.
I don't know why I was arrested
but I remember they threatened me
and trussed me up.
While I was in prison,
my darling, were you broken hearted?

M My sweetheart, I was also in prison in January.
I feel sick and sad whenever I talk about it.
My sweetheart, I was chasing you in the park
and someone in the park was also chasing me.
Do you know that I was arrested
because I was chatting you up in the park?
I was taken to the police station.
They asked me what I was doing in the park.
They wanted to beat me
and wanted to tie me up.
Oh, my sweetheart, my darling,
if I was imprisoned again,
would you send me meals there?

F I was in prison in February.
There I could do nothing but weep.
Because I was in prison
I didn't know where you were.
I really wanted to come out to see you!
It was indescribable suffering being in prison,
but they wouldn't set me free.
What could I do?

M My sweetheart, I have been in prison since February.
I am worried about you, my dear.
My darling, my sweetheart,
I worry about you.
You are looking after everything at home
My darling, my sweetheart.
I don't mind that I am in prison,
but I am concerned that I had to leave you alone at home.
My dear, I know you'll do all the housekeeping.
I know you worry about me and miss me very much.
But my dear, you have to bear all this

and look after our children well.
My darling, my sweetheart
I really don't know
when I can be free again.

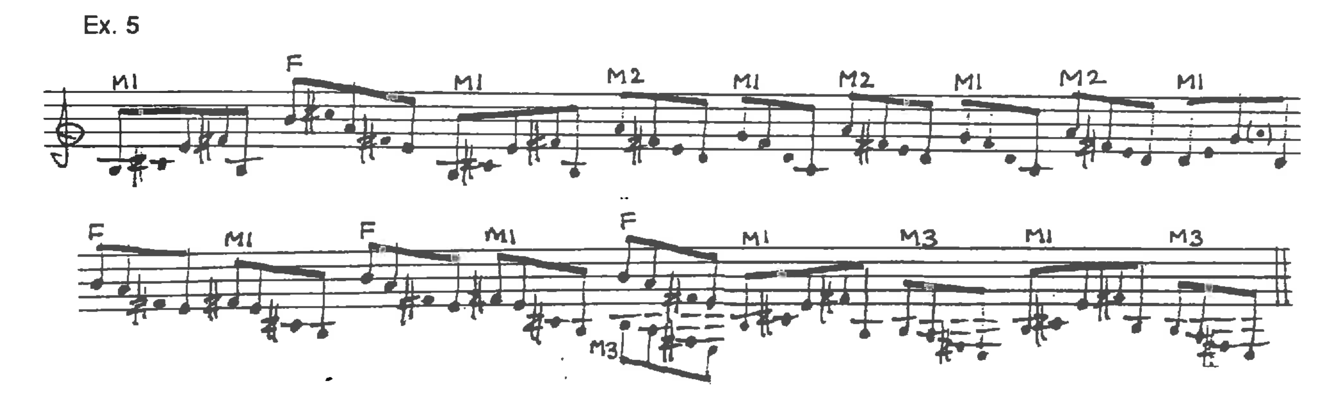
(recorded in Hebing park, Guiyang, 8 January, 1987)

EXCERPT II

In the first two of the male singer's verses the melody is extended from the third line onwards by repetition. Soon after the beginning of the excerpt a man interupts asking the first male singer to give up his position to other singers. The idea is rejected. The female singer and a third man try to convince him but to no avail. The antagonisms and alliances of this verbal negotiation are reflected in a remarkable way in the structure of tonal relationships between the voices.

At first the two singers use tetracord modes which are complementary, though the male's opening phrase ascends while the female's descends (Ex. 5). A second male interrupts with a new tetracord structure and at a higher level than the first male. The two men negotiate using two different, non-complementary tetracords a tone apart. With the first male's third answer to the challenge he raises his pitch level to that of the challenger, though he keeps his own tetracord structure. The female joins the argument, at her former pitch level. The first male answers her at his original level, though with a falling opening phrase. A third man joins the fray, overlapping with the female, singing an octave below her, in a sense, speaking on her behalf. The first male reverts completely to his original ascending phrase and with one more stubborn exchange the dialogue reaches a stalemate, and the singing terminates.

Ex. 5



F *(concluding)*.......My man, my darling,
I think you will suffer because of your cruel fate.

M It was January, then.
My darling was standing in front of Natian Gate.
My dear, I met you in January,
I feel in love with you in February.
My business flourished in March.
I married you in April, my darling.
I made love to you every day in May
You gave birth to our baby in June.
I went to school in July
I graduated in August
I became a cadre in September.
My dearest, we are bound to have a very happy life together.

F My darling, the wall of your house was smashed.
You came ask me to shift to a new house as well.
We shifted to new houses at the same time.
I moved to Da Shi Zi, and you to Qian Lin Shan
(M My sweetheart,you are singing and I am trying to follow you.)

F My darling, if I give you a hoe
you must go and dig the mountain.
I can dig very wide and deep
and if you can do the same
I'll cook corn and rice for you.
Oh, my dear, you eat so much you feel bloated
You fart at night, my dear,
damaging my quilt and straw mat.
I hate getting up to sew and mend the quilt and straw mat.
Oh my dear, I should have asked you
to sew and mend the straw mat yourself.
But I don't curse you, because you are my lover.

M My darling, my dear, you're singing, and I'm listening.
You have the most beautiful hair I have ever seen.
When the wind blows your hair twines around me.
My darling, hold me close and don't let me go.

M2 Hey, young fellow,
could you please stop singing for a while?
Let me sing a few songs with this lady.
Young fellow, you'd better go and have a cup of tea.

Ml Well, my comrade, my old uncle,
I don't think you are patient enough.
My old uncle, let me sing a few more, say six or eight songs
and then you can follow.

M2 Young fellow, my comrade, please listen to me.
You've sung quite a lot and you should stop.
Time is very limited
and many people are still waiting for their turn to sing.

M1 Come on! My old uncle,
you are too serious.
I've told you fellows to just wait for a while
Let me sing just a few more, and then you follow.

M2 Young fellow,
I know you can sing very well
but you should give others a chance as well.
What do you think?

M1 Well, I'm listening to you, my old uncle.
I'm just making the best use of my time to sing.
I came here especially to sing songs.
Please just let me sing a few more with my woman.

F My darling, you should listen to the others,
and go and have a cup of tea.
I really want to sing with you,
but you know many people here want to sing with me as well.

M1 My darling, you see that if you plant a tree on a hill
you need to wait at least ten years for it to grow into a tree.
So I ask them to be patient.
I meet you here just once a year.

F My darling, don't you feel ashamed to behave like this?
Go away and have a cup of tea.
Let others sing a few songs as well.
I've got so many people waiting to sing with me.

M1 I understand what you mean, my dear,
but let me sing just one more song with you, my darling,
then I will have a rest.
I haven't many opportunities to come here to sing with you.
F Hey, that fellow over there,
just ignore this young fellow and just start singing please.

M3 Well, young fellow,
I think it's fair that everyone has a chance to sing

M1 Yes I'm listening to you my old uncle.
But I want to sing just one more song.
Would you please let me sing just one more with the woman?
I don't think it would be too much to sing one more song.

M3 Young fellow, time waits for nobody!
My brother, you'd be a good fellow if you let others sing.
It is fair that everyone gets to sing here.
It's very impolite of you to sing all the time.

M1 Old uncle, I don't care, the more I sing, the more inspired I become.
You see, there are about a hundred people here,
and as the old saying goes - first come, first served!
So those who arrive late should wait their turn.

M3 Young fellow, it's not your right to say if it's my turn to sing.
This woman and I are good friends.
She is willing to sing with me now.
You, young fellow, go away now and have a rest.
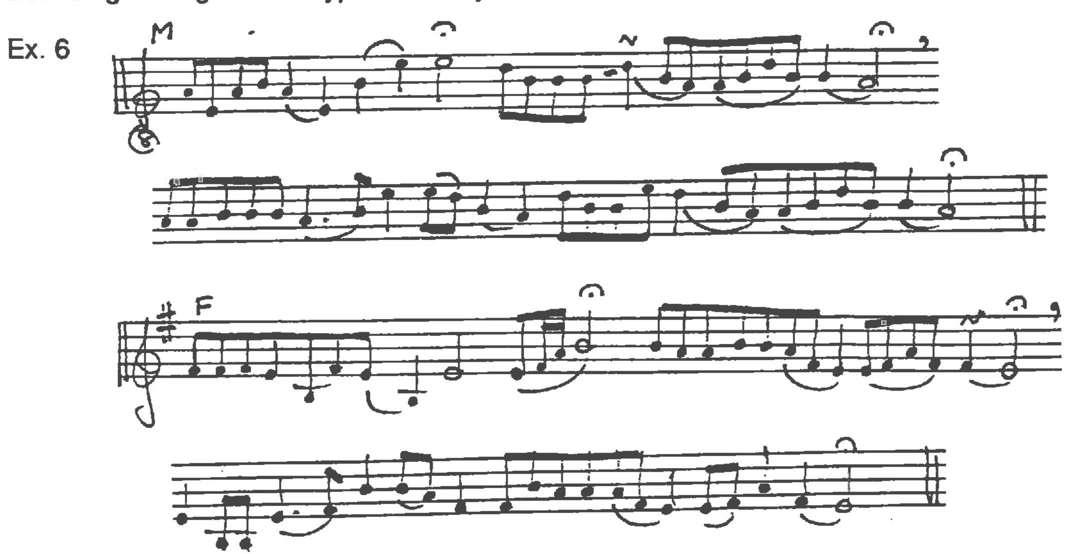
(recorded in the Guiyang teahouse, 24 January, 1987)

EXCERPT III

What begins as a conventional exchange of poetic compliments with reference to lovers from classical literature and folk mythology soon degenerates into a fantastic and ridiculous chronicle of the sufferings of a jilted lover. Verses subesquent to this excerpt describe the members of the lover's family in insulting terms, and the experience of falling into the sump hole - toilet humour at it's most basic!
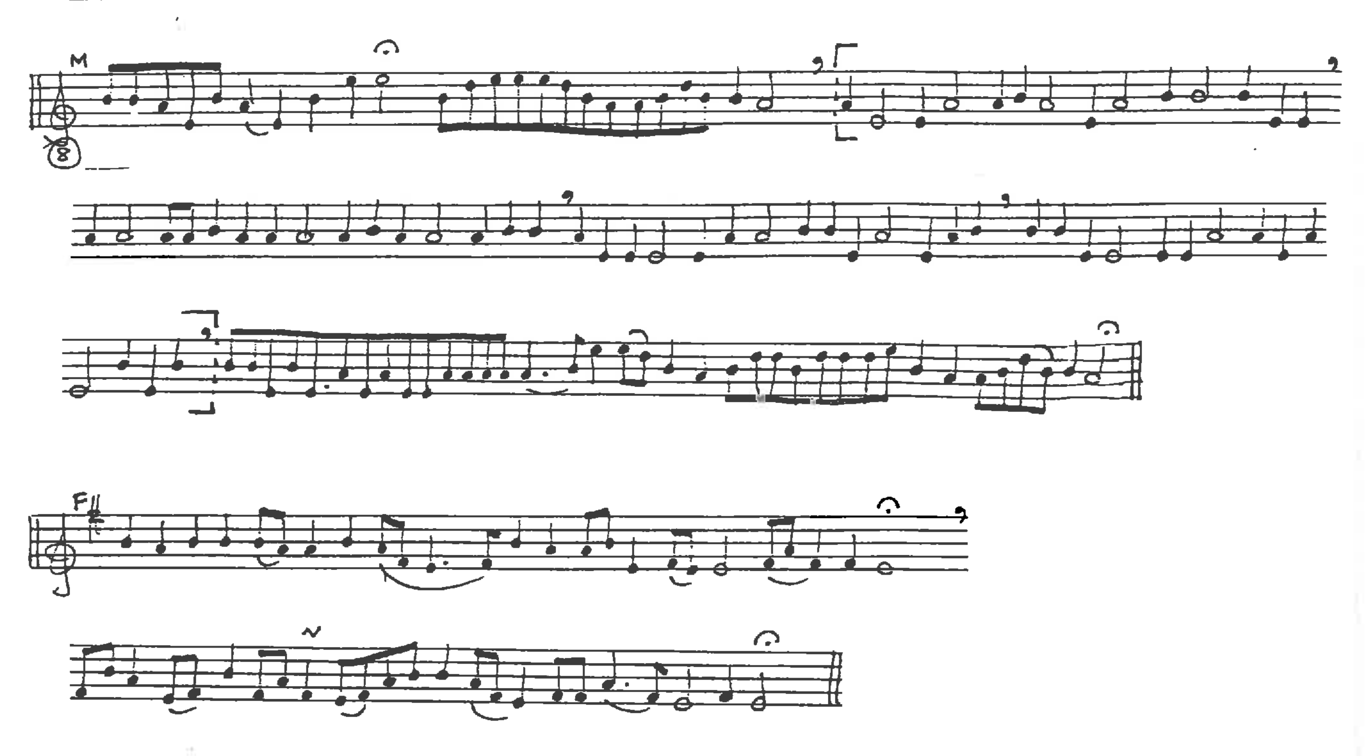
Both singers begin with a type A melody.

Ex. 6



The male's interpolation in his fifth verse does not elicit a similar verse expansion from the female singer. In fact she changes her melody to type B whose more restricted compass seems to match perfectly the man's interpolation (Ex 7) . The implication perhaps is that she is happy to let his fantasy develop unchallenged.

Ex. 7



M *(concluding)*.......My dear, my darling,
I have been thinking of you every day for eighteen years.

F My sweetheart, your singing makes me feel so happy.
One day as you ride by on a horse
I'll try to block your way
because I want to sing with you and to marry you.

M I am singing and my darling is following me,
just as Liang Shan Bo sang to Zhu Ying Tai.
My dear, we can't see each other often,
and this makes us lovesick.

F My sweetheart, you are singing and I am following you,
just as Liang Shan Bo sang to Zhu Ying Tai.
I'm singing with you because I am in love with you.
I always dream of making love to you at night.

M I am singing and my sweetheart is following me,
just as Qiu Xiang follows Pan Lang.
They say a monk and a nun can't elope like laymen,
but you and I can have a love affair.

F A drum beaten on a hill echoes in the valley
Every girl wants to love and be loved.
But my darling, you seem to have someone else already.
Why do you still want to be with me?

M I am singing and my sweetheart follows me.
I come to the teahouse to express my love to you, my dearest.
I am just like Tang Bo Hu
who fell in love with Qiu Xiang at first sight.

F A drum beaten on a hill echoes in the valley
Every girl wants to love and be loved.
But my darling, you seem to have someone else already.
What do you think I can do?

M A drum beaten on a hill echoes in the valley (see Ex 7 above)
When flowers are cultivated they grow and blossom.
I was so excited
the time I met you and sang with you.
I see you every night in my dreams.
Your songs linger in my ears.
I can't write with my pen,
I can't sleep well and I have no appetite.
I am always absent-minded and can't even walk properly
My sweetheart, my dear, please tell me why I am so sick.
Tell me what sort of medicine I need to cure this sickness.

F My darling, you are singing and I am listening.
I want you always, and you are always in my heart.
No medicine in the world can cure your sickness
unless you come to see me and sing with me every day.

M I left home yesterday and returned today.
I have fallen in love with you and can't bear to leave you again
just as Wan Qi Lian couldn't leave Meng Jiang Nu,
and Liang Shang Bo didn't want to leave Zhu Ying Tai.
They say that Ping Gui and Bao Shan Jie were loath to be parted,
and Gui Ping hated leaving Lu Xiu Cai.
My darling, my dear, I also hate leaving you
and that's why I come back again.

F You left but you came back.
Flowers fall but leave seeds.
You departed yesterday but you left your love with me.
I am so happy to be with you , and so excited that you have returned.

M You send me a message yesterday
asking me to meet you under the tree in your garden.
I left my home early in the morning.
Your house is so far away from mine that I arrived at your garden at sunset.
My straw sandals were worn out
and I had many blisters on my feet.
I waited for you under the tree in your garden.
I waited and waited but you never showed up.
Suddenly it rained cats and dogs.
I was so wet
I looked like a drenched chicken.
I could do nothing but pick a leaf to cover my head.
You were sitting beside the fire at home
while I was freezing to death.
Oh my naughty girl, how many times do you think you can tease me?
If you tease me once more you are bound to be bitten by a wildcat during the night.

(recorded in the Guiyang teahouse, 17 January, 1987)



EXCERPT IV

This is a multiple negotiation involving three men and two women. The third male singer requests a change of female partner. Compliments are exchanged , and references made to the famous mythical lovers Liang Shan Bo and Zhu Ying Tai.

M1 I am riding a horse crossing a river
They say one goes fishing
because one wants to eat fish.
I come here because I want to sing with you, my dear.

M2 Only a few people present are singing
so it's not too much if I sing just one song.
If you think I have sung too many songs,
you should come and sing here every day.

Ml If you want to sing, please sing.
I don't mind.
People come to the teahouse for enjoyment.
Everyone can sing a few songs.

M3 First come, first sings, it's fair.
But you and I are good friends.
So please let me sing first even though you came here before me today.
I'll let you sing first if I come earlier tomorrow.

Fl My sister and I came to the teahouse together.
We want to sing songs with someone like you.
So if you are willing to sing with us,
I'd like you to sing with my sister.

M3 Yes, my darling,
I'd like you to be a go-between
so please introduce me to your sister.
I'd be pleased to sing with her, and I'll always be grateful.

Fl Since you'd like to meet my sister and sing with her
I'll ask her to sing with you.
My sister and I are very close.
She will listen to me.

M3 My dearest, please come here
and sing a few songs with me.
Please sing with me.
I'll take your songs home with me.

F2 Yes, my dear, I'll follow you as soon as you start singing.
They say that birds die for food, and people die for money.
They also say that bees are busy sucking nectar, and dying for flowers,
and Liang Shan Bo sacrifices himself only for Zhu Ying Tai.

M3 My darling, your song is so beautiful and touching
that I am deeply moved.
I would like to be Liang Shan Bo for you,
and ask you to be Zhu Ying Tai for me.

F2 My sweetheart, I am listening to you very carefully.
They say that birds die for food, and people die for money.
They also say that bees are busy sucking nectar, and dying for flowers,
and Liang Shan Bo sacrifices himself only for Zhu Ying Tai.

M3 My dearest, you have soft and delicate skin
and you look very beautiful.
I wonder with whom you are going to marry
You are so intelligent and you must be without equal in your village

F2 I am so pleased to hear what you have been singing to me.
I seldom have a chance to sing with you
because I rarely come here to the teahouse.
And so I am very glad that you say so many wonderful things to me.

M3 My darling, your teeth are as white as snow,
and your lips are as thin as a piece of paper.
you are so clever and beautiful
that you are without equal in Guiyang.

F2 Your teeth are as white as snow,
and your lips are lips that I would like to kiss.
Where are you from my handsome man?
You also are peerless in Guiyang.

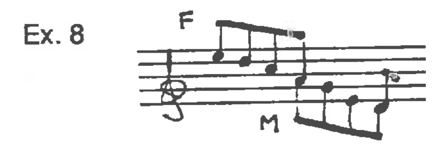
(recorded in the Guiyang teahouse, 24 January, 1987)

EXCERPT V

This exchange is more in the nature of a word play than an actual dialogue. The singers are probably of Buyi nationality and their melodies and style of singing, with its fast and intense quality, is quite different from the previous examples.
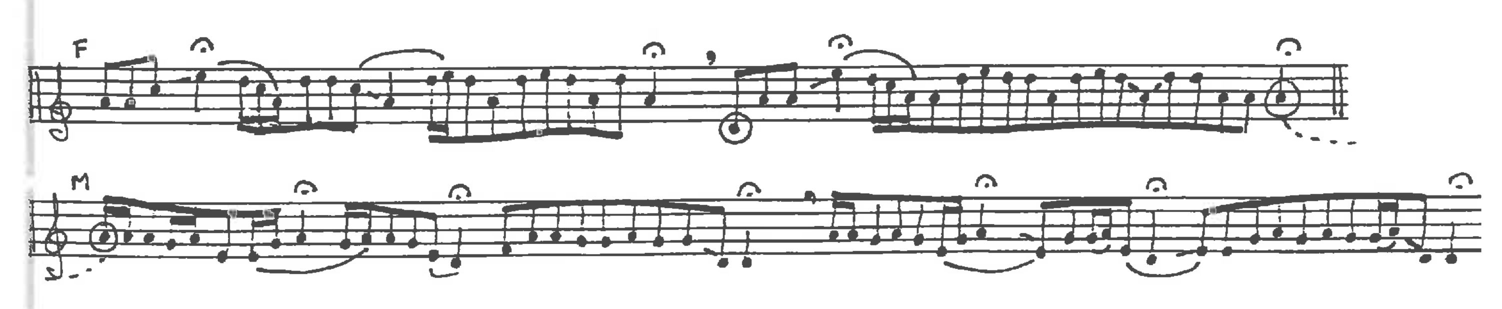
The tetracords of the two singers complement each other.

Ex. 8



Although they share the same melody (albeit within a different tetracord structure) their two versions imply an "embracing" of each by the other: the male's melody has a different opening from the female's and always begins on his uppermost note (the final cadence note of the female) while the "feminine embrace" is seen in the female's frequent use of a low anacrusis note which is in fact the lowest note of the male's melodic compass.

Ex. 9



F I miss you so much
I am afraid I'll go mad if I can't see you soon.
I want to be with you.
I wonder whether you want to be with me.

M I am so excited whenever I think of you.
Whenever I go fishing
I can't hook a fish but I catch a watersnake.
How can anyone say that I don't miss you?

F2 I am so pleased to hear what you have been singing to me.
I seldom have a chance to sing with you
because I rarely come here to the teahouse.
And so I am very glad that you say so many wonderful things to me.

M3 My darling, your teeth are as white as snow,
and your lips are as thin as a piece of paper.
you are so clever and beautiful
that you are without equal in Guiyang.

F2 Your teeth are as white as snow,
and your lips are lips that I would like to kiss.
Where are you from my handsome man?
You also are peerless in Guiyang.

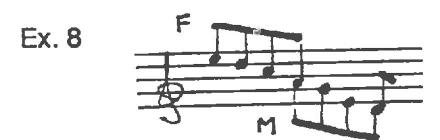
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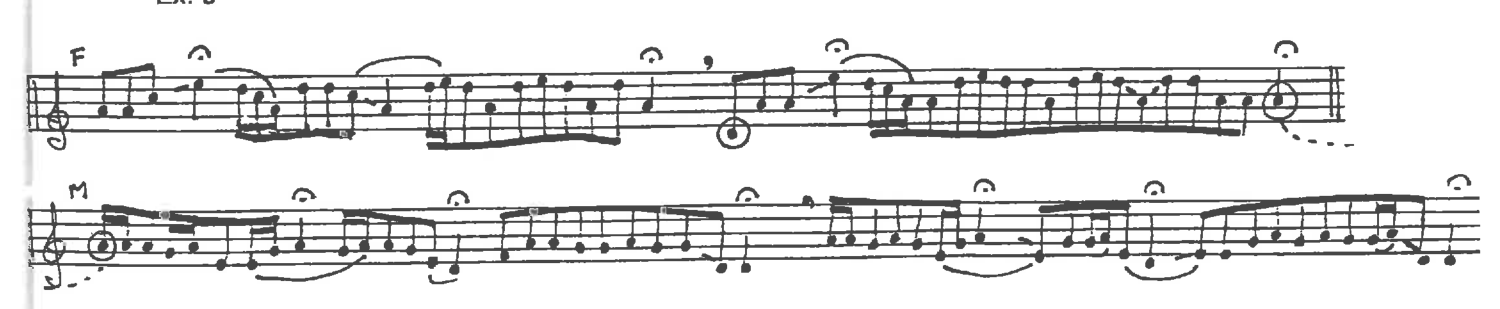
The tetracords of the two singers complement each other.

Ex. 8



Although they share the same melody (albeit within a different tetracord structure) their two versions imply an "embracing" of each by the other: the male's melody has a different opening from the female's and always begins on his uppermost note (the final cadence note of the female) while the "feminine embrace" is seen in the female's frequent use of a low anacrusis note which is in fact the lowest note of the male's melodic compass.

Ex. 9



F I miss you so much
I am afraid I'll go mad if I can't see you soon.
I want to be with you.
I wonder whether you want to be with me.

M I am so excited whenever I think of you.
Whenever I go fishing
I can't hook a fish but I catch a watersnake.
How can anyone say that I don't miss you?

F I think of you so much every day
I become forgetful, and take my foot-binding cloth as a handkerchief.
I become crazy because of you.
I don't know if you think of me similarly.

M Of course I miss you very much.
Whenever I go fishing
I can't hook a fish but I catch a watersnake.
How can anyone say that I don't miss you?

F I feel restless thinking of you.
I take my footbinding cloth as a towel by mistake.
I miss you very much,
but you don't seem to miss me.

M There are fish in streams and rivers.
But I'd rather go fishing in a pond than in streams and rivers,
because it is easier to catch fish in a pond.
I am waiting for you to come to me,
then I'll catch you as I catch a fish in the pond

F I feel muddle-headed because of missing you.
I follow you here because I want to be with you.
But you seem to prefer to sing with others.

M There are fish in streams and rivers.
I prefer the ease of fishing in a pond than in streams and rivers
I am waiting for you to come to me,
just as I am waiting for a fish to get hooked.

F I feel upset thinking of you.
I come here because I want to be with you.
But you don't seem to be interested in me.
You seem to prefer the company of others.

M I always want to choose a beautiful girl to be my lover.
You are the one in a hundred.
How can you say that I am not interested in you?
I really want you to be my partner.

(recorded in Hebing Park, Guiyang, February 16, 1987



Transcriptions of vocal polyphony of the Dong, Buyi, Zhuang, Yi, Mulao, Yao and She Minority Nationalities of China.

Nicholas Wheeler

INTRODUCTION

This transcription project examines 13 songs selected from an available total of 88. These songs were chosen for their musical interest and because they illustrate a variety of multi-voice, or polyphonic song structures. (A further selection of six songs have been included on the recording, but are untranscribed.)

The songs were recorded by Professor Zhou Deyi of the Wuhan Music Conservatory, during the **Symposium of Polyphonic Songs of the Minorities in Some Districts and Provinces of China**, a conference jointly sponsored by the Musicians Association of China and the Art Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and held in Nan Ning, Quangxi province from 13-23 April 1982.

Six scholars spoke at the conference, including Professor Zhou, and singing troupes from eleven provinces performed. Professor Zhou supplied Mr Jack Body of the School of Music at Victoria University of Wellington with a copy of his recordings, and permission for them to be used for this publication.

It should be clear that transcriptions are of a single performance - little is know of the significance of the music or its cultural context. Some contextual information was gleaned from commentary that was recorded at the conference, but for the most part such data was not available.

Mr Gong Hong Yu assisted in the translation of the commentary. Because no translators of the sung languages were available we have had to rely upon the commentary descriptions of the texts.

These notes are a shortened version of a paper written in 1989 as part of a B.Mus (Hons) course, in the School of Music, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

RECORDED EXAMPLES

I. DONG BIG-SONG

Dong music is found in several counties in the Guizhou province, such as Liping, Rongjiang, and Congjiang as well as ten other counties. There are also some areas in the Guangxi province, such as in parts of the Sanjiang county, where Dong music can be found.

Dong vocal music is divided into two categories: small-song and big-song. Small-song is sung by only one person who is generally, but not always, accompanied by a musical instrument. Big-song is polyphonic and is sung by a group, and divided into two broad categories:

a) Love songs

b) Narrative songs - which are further classified as
   i) songs relating the migrations of ancestors
   ii) songs relating folk tales
   iii) song relating heroic tales.

Big-song is a very popular form of music and there are about 1000 performing groups within this region. Singers start learning at the age of about 7 or 8 years. They are able to join big-song groups but it is only after a process of strict training and selection and performing in competitions that they are recognised as full member of a formal big-song group.
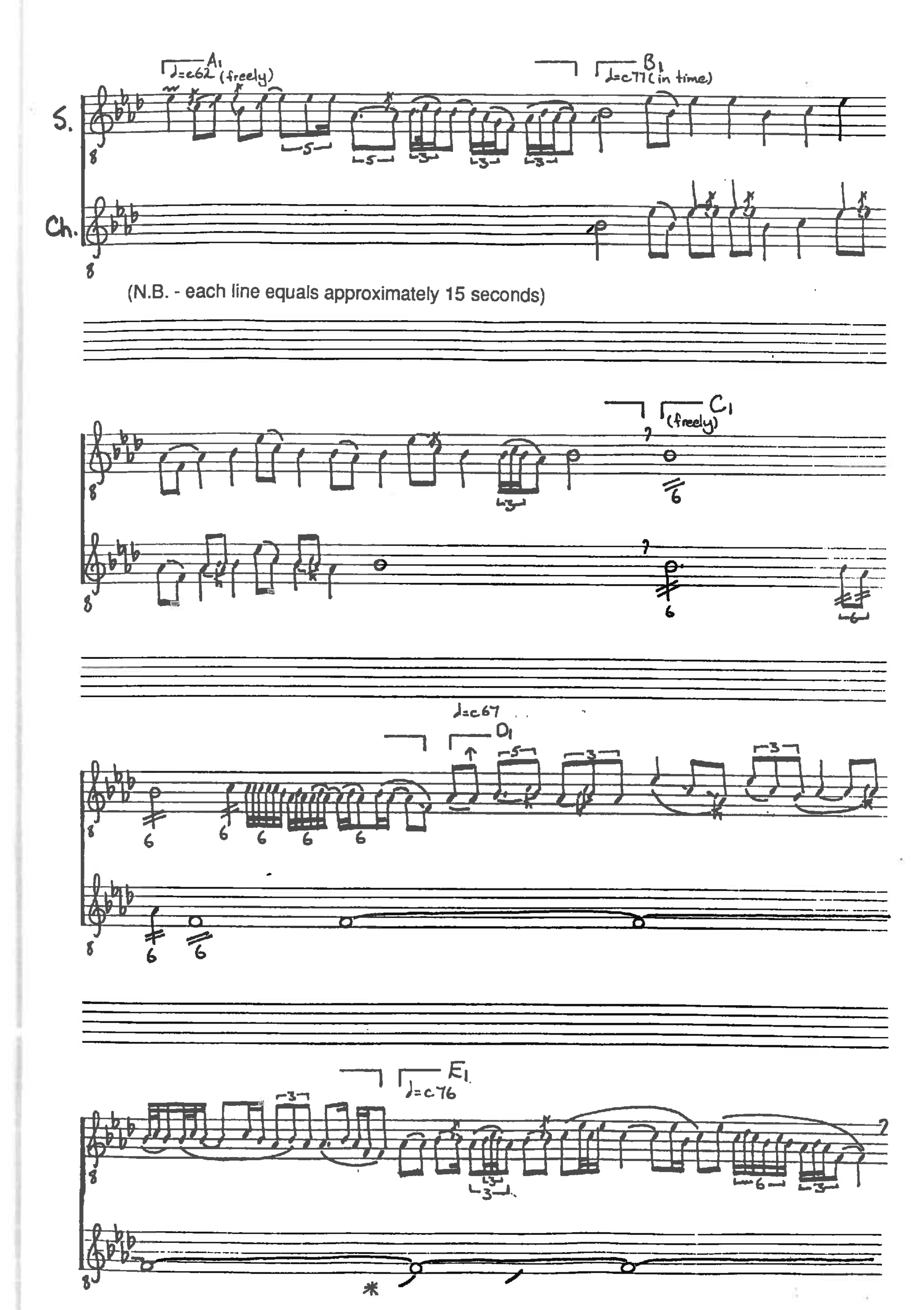
Big-song singing style varies according to the village or area. Each village generally has several big-song groups, sometimes as many as twenty. Each big-song group has at the core of its repertoire at least ten songs which are special to that group. Factors which affect how a big-song group sound include the dialect of the area and the group's teacher - each teacher is recognized as having an individual style.

The big-songs presented at the conference are mainly traditional ones in which the tunes and verses are comparatively old. However, to illustrate some of the developments that have occurred in big-song there are several examples of big-song that have been re-written by professional musicians from Liping.One style of big-song that developed after the revolution in 1949 involves both male and female singers whereas in the past only unmixed voices performed big-song.

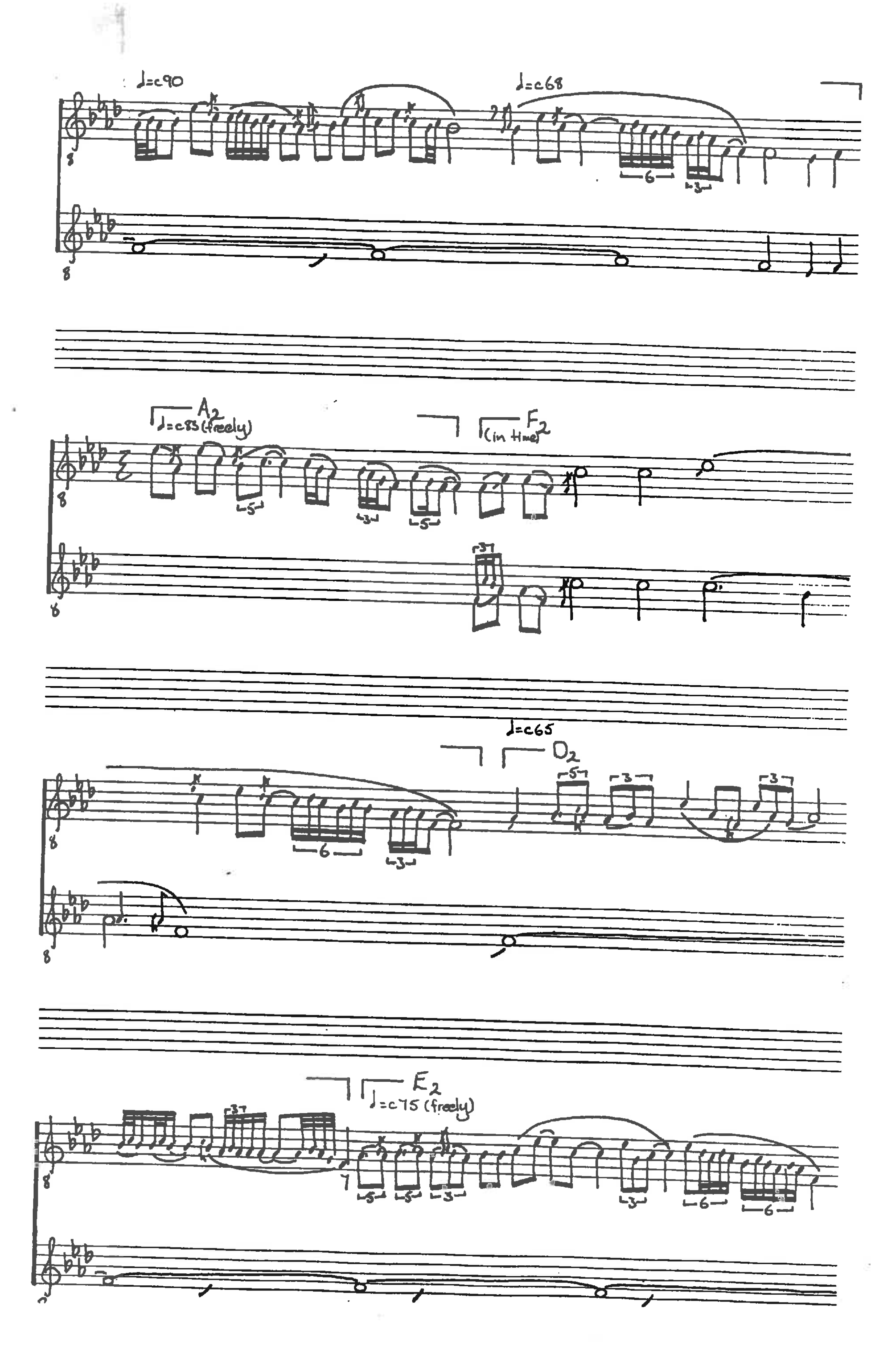
Although the performances on this tape took place in a concert/seminar situation the customary proceedures were adhered to. Since Dong big-song is normally based around the visit of one group to another, the male group is acting as the guest group and the female group as the host group.
In order to greet one another the two groups line up and exchange songs as well as conversation. The greeting songs normally express the love, affection and respect of one group for the other and often the groups are very effusive in the praises they heap on each other.

This Dong big-song is called "Ga Ning "- Song of the Spring Cicada. The singers include Pan Xian-hua and Pan Xian-tai as well as six others from Xiao-huang village in Congjiang county in the southeast of the autonomous prefecture of Guizhou province. Recorded on 15 April 1982.
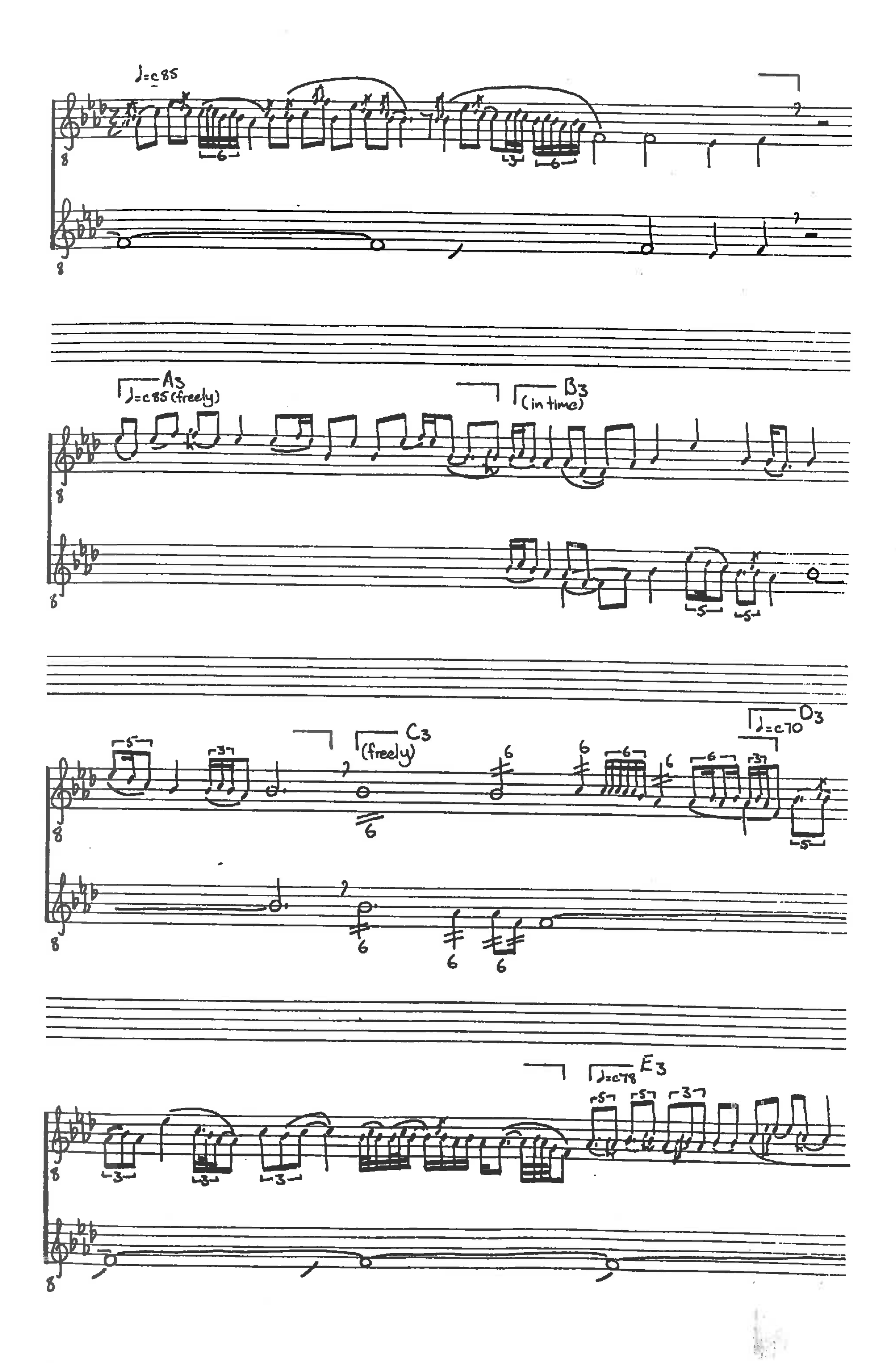
The verse is:
The cicada is lamenting on the maple tree. The cicada is lamenting on the pine tree. "If I can't get you I will grow older and older".
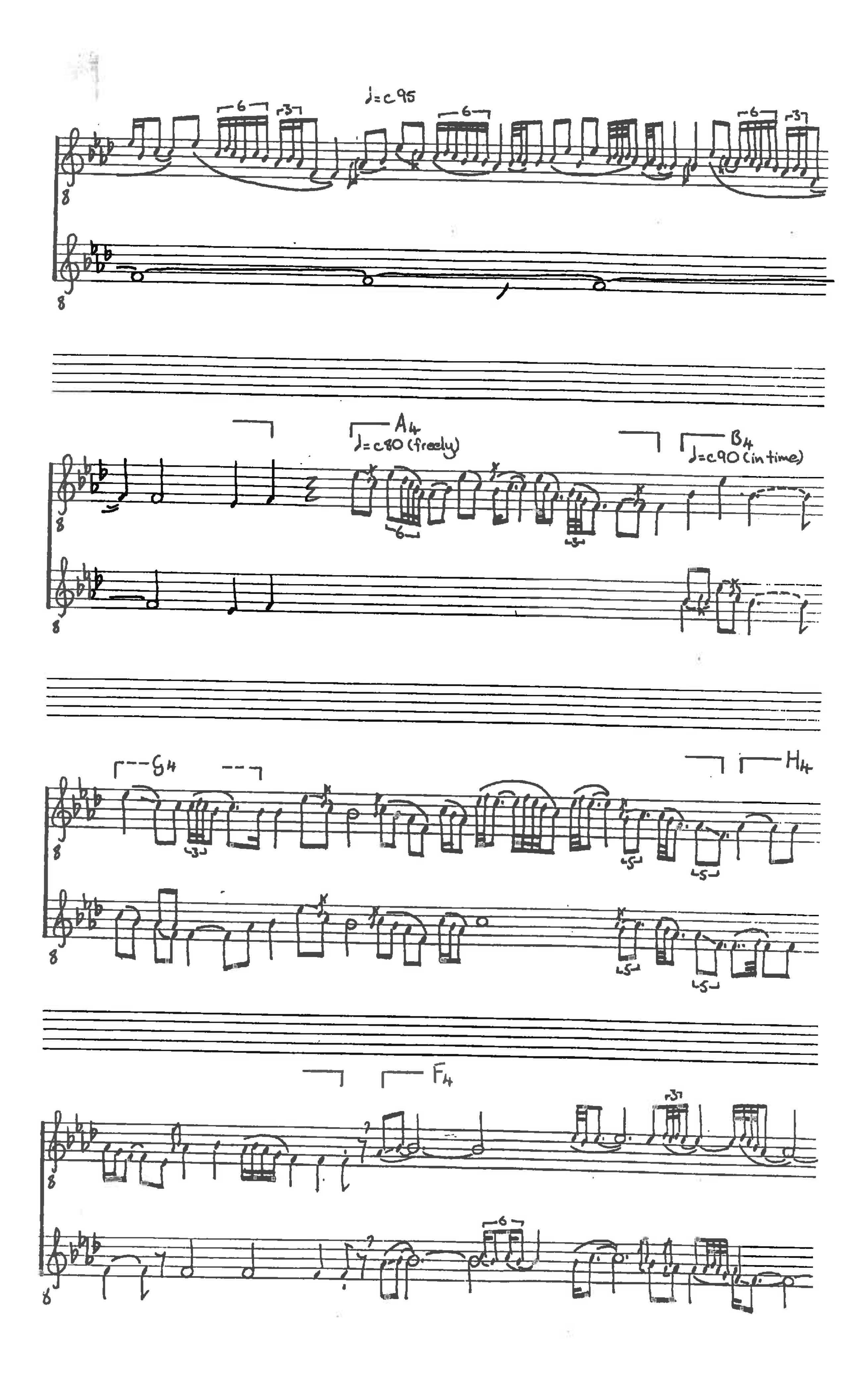


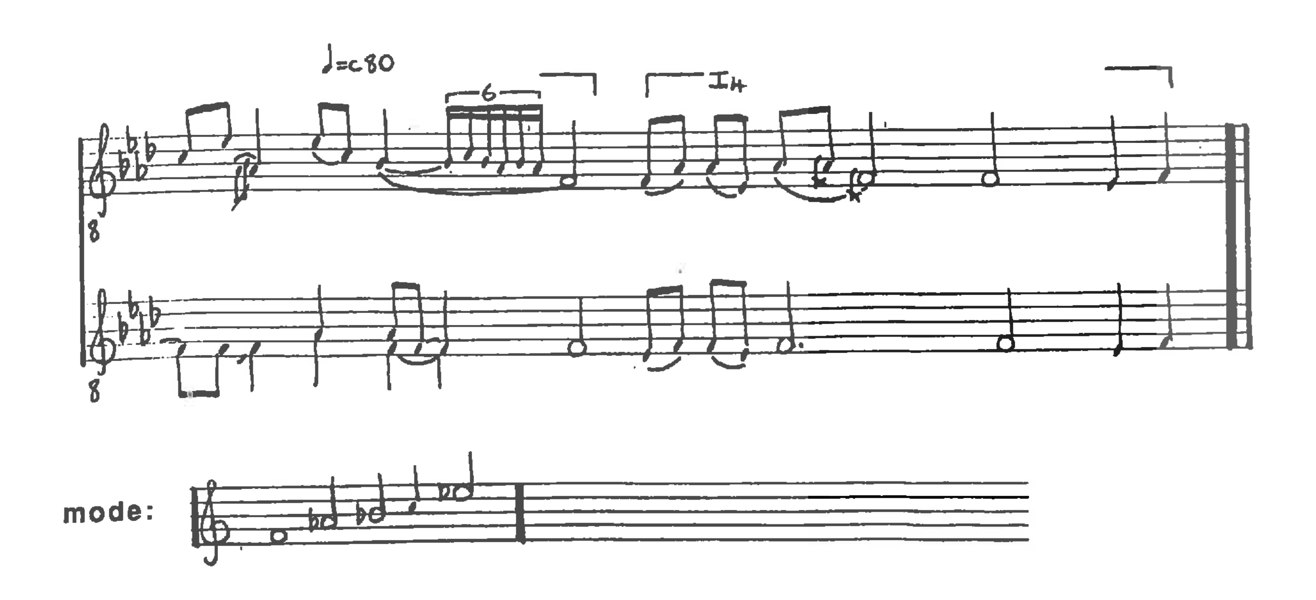
* the sign / underneath one of the drone notes indicates that one or more voices slides up to the note while the other voices sustain the drone.



♩=c90
♩=c68
A2
♩=c83 (freely)
F2
(in time)
♩=c65
D2
E2
♩=c75 (freely)


♩=c 85
A3
♩=c 85 (freely)
B3
(in time)
C3
(freely)
D3
♩=c 70
E3
♩=c 78


♩=c95
A4
♩=c80 (freely)
B4
♩=c90 (in time)
G4
H4
F4



Analysis

Several types of polyphonic texture are included in this song which has four sections or stanzas and nine different types of musical phras. In the transcription of this song the phrase types are identified with letters A - I, suffixed with a number (1-4) indicating the section. Square brackets show where the phrases begin and end.

Each of the four sections commences with a solo phrase A(1 - 4) and in three off the four sections this is followed by a unison phrase with both soloists and chorus singing B(1,3, 4). In the second section there is a very brief unison phrase which is different from those in B and which is labelled F2.

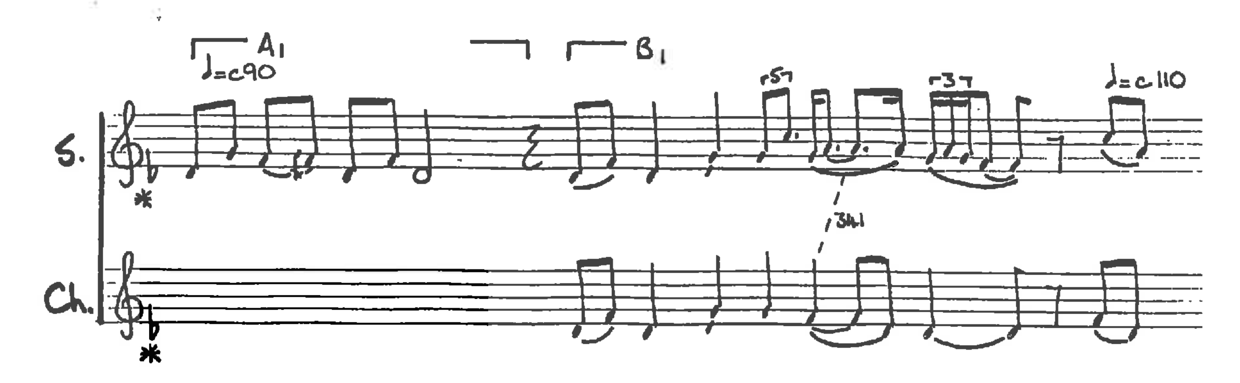
The movement of the two parts is distinctive, from a unison to a fifth, a third and then a fleeting unison on the 'tonic' F. The next two types of musical phrase, D and E, are both examples of 'drone polyphony'. These phrases are very similar in content but are separated into two distinct types because the soloists alternate in singing them i.e..the soloist who sings phrase D will not sing phrase E. In addition phrase D is a shorter form of phrase E.

The phrases labelled F2 and F4 share polyphonic features with phrase C but are more extensive phrases with a development of parallel chords. These phrases start with a unison which then moves to a third followed by two parallel fifths. The phrase ends on a unison on the 'tonic' F after the upper voice has descended to it.

The last three phrases G, H and I only occur in section 4. G4 is inserted in B4 and is an example of 'parallel chords'. H4 is a type of 'drone polyphony' with the drone note being repeated rather than held as in phrases D and E and I4 is a coda which features the same cadential figure that ends each of the previous three sections (E1,2,3).

A 'schema' of the types of phrases is as follows:
1. A B C D E
2. A F D E
3. A B C D E
4. A (G) H F I

II. DONG BIG-SONG (?) (There was no recorded identification or commentary for this song).



* N.B. D♭ is consistently between about 10 – 40 cents sharp. Numbers between intervals indicate the number of cents between the notes.

(N.B. - each line equals approximately 10 seconds)

♩=c80

386
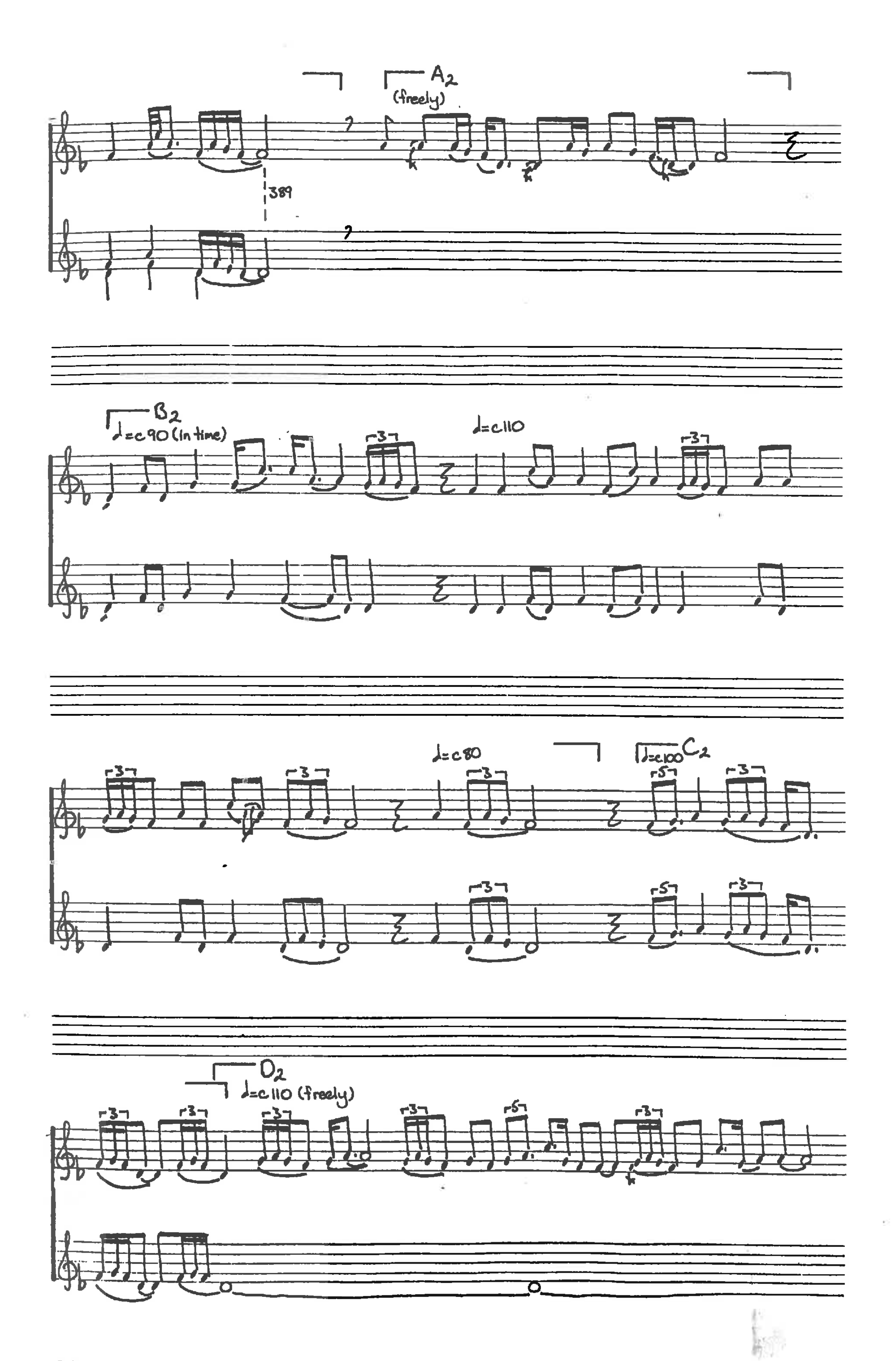
♩=c95 C1

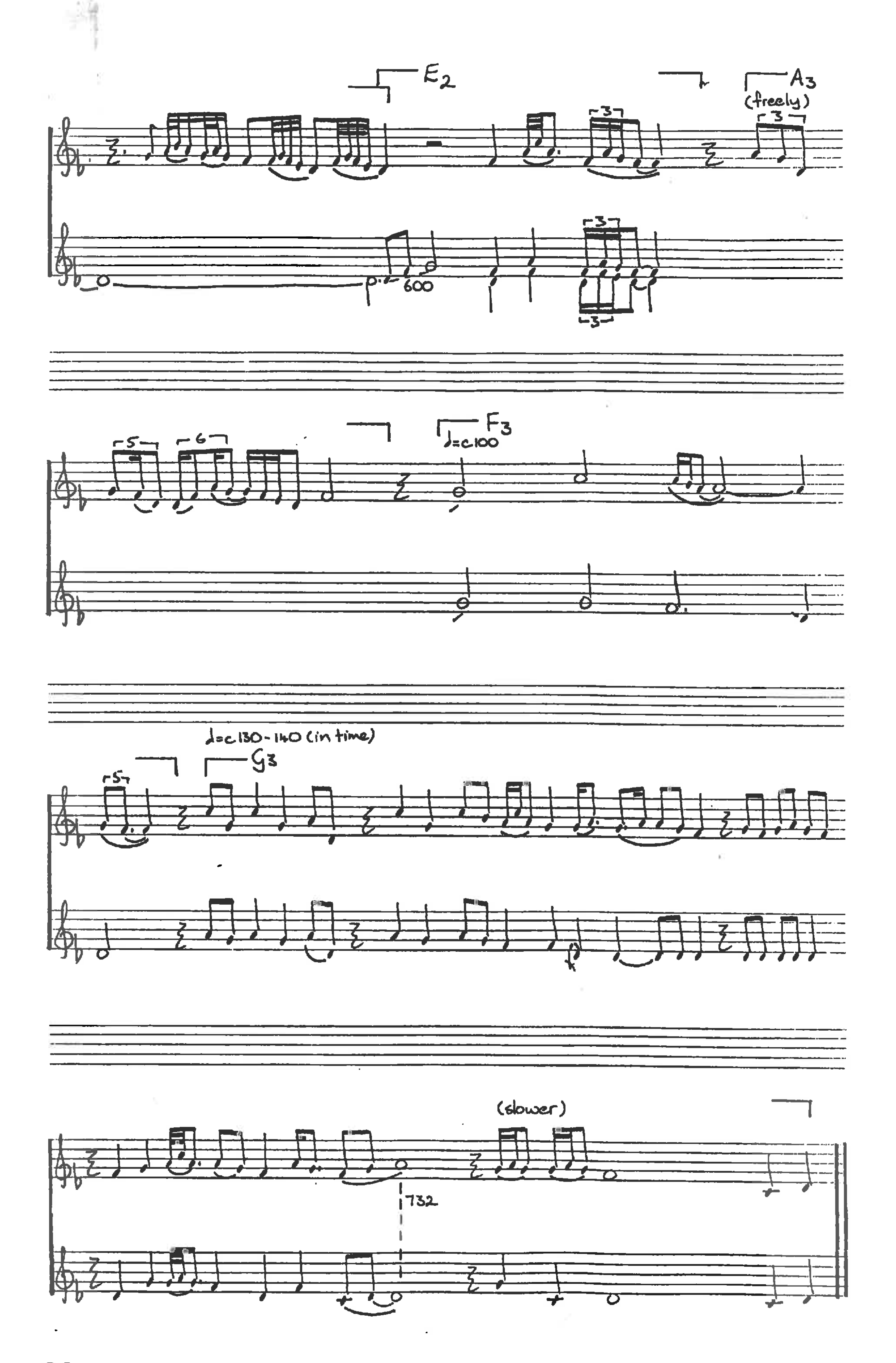
D1 (freely)

741

E1

600


A2
(freely)
389
B2
♩=c90 (in time)
♩=c110
♩=c80
♩=c100 C2
D2
♩=c110 (freely)



E2
A3
(freely)
3
600
F3
♩=c100
♩=c130-140 (in time)
G3
(slower)
732

mode:

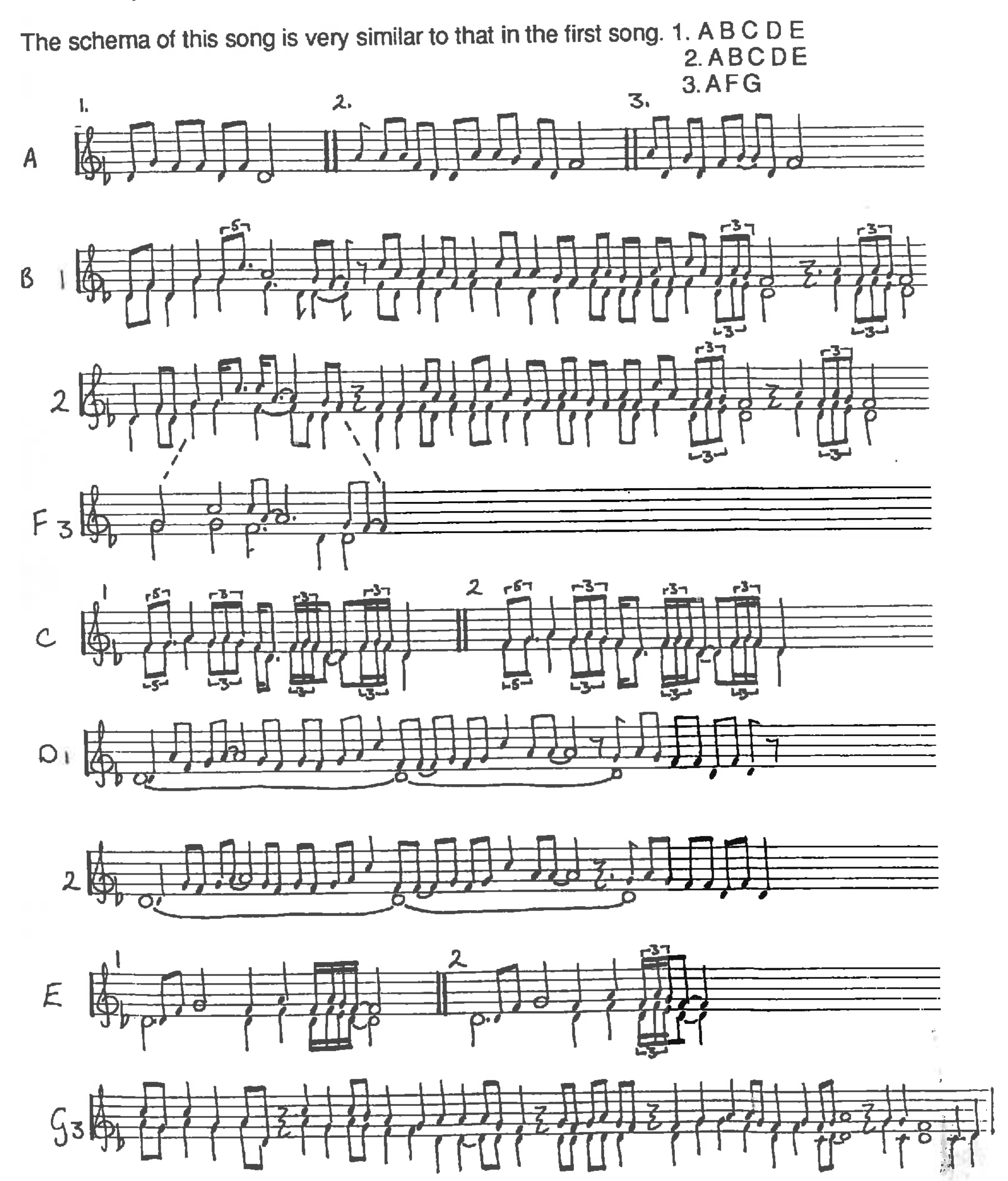
Analysis

This song has seven types of phrase, labelled A - G, and is in three sections. The number suffix (1-3) after each letter indicates the section. Each section commences with a solo phrase (A). In sections1 and 2 this is followed by phrase B which starts with a short unison passage and then proceeds in 'parallel chords' which are mostly at the third and less frequently at the fifth. Following phrase B is phrase C, a short passage in unison. Phrases C1 and C2 are followed by phrases D1 and D2 which are examples of 'drone polyphony'. Phrases E1 and E2 end the first two sections with a short passage using parallel chords.

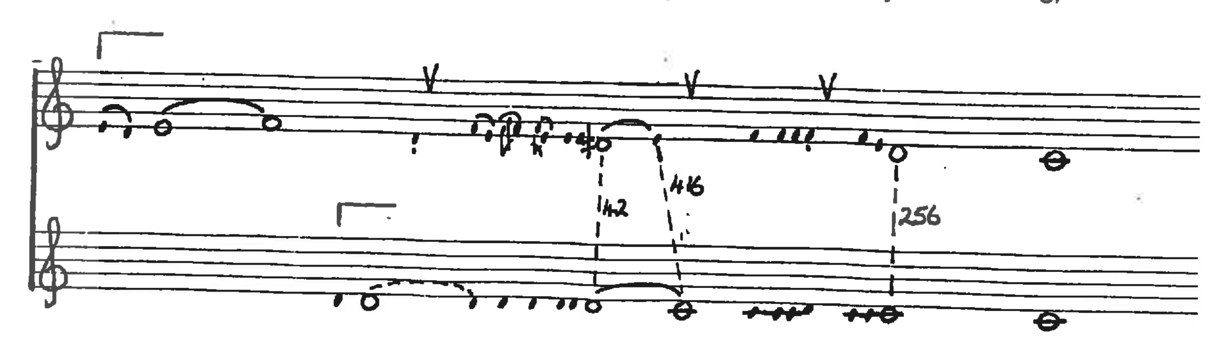
In section 3 phrase B is replaced by phrase F which, as the analysis shows, is a segment of phrase B slowed down. The final phrase, G3, is similar to phrase B in that it is mostly parallel chords at the third or fifth. The final 'cadence' uses a figure identical to that used in the first song in that it is a unison progression from the 'subtonic' to the 'tonic' of the mode.

It is worth emphasising the point made on the score that the 'tonic' Dflat is consistently sharp by between 10 - 40 cents in comparison to an equal tempered interval. This creates an distinctive tonal relationship between the voices.

The schema of this song is very similar to that in the first song. 1. A B C D E
2. A B C D E
3. A F G
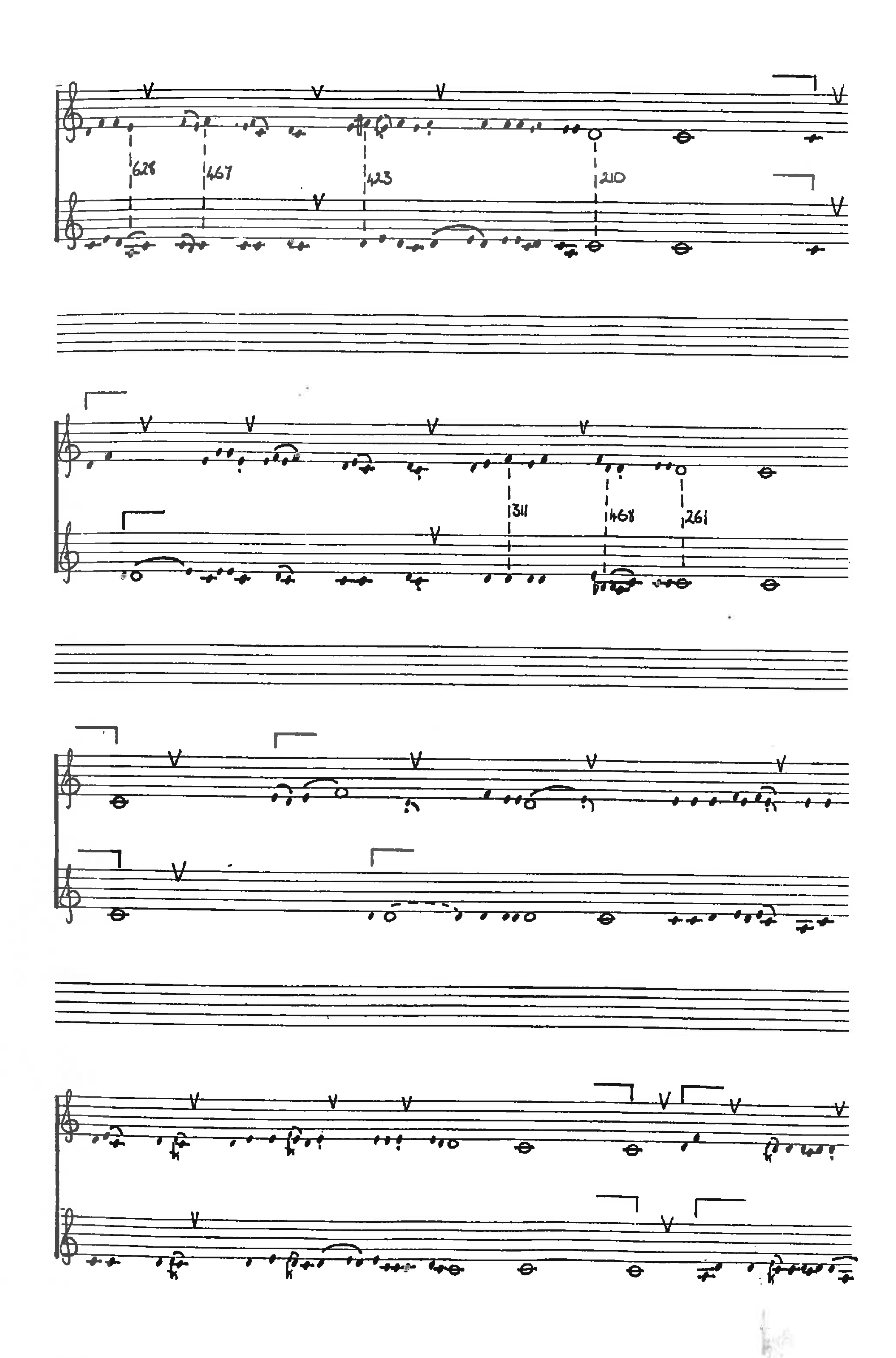


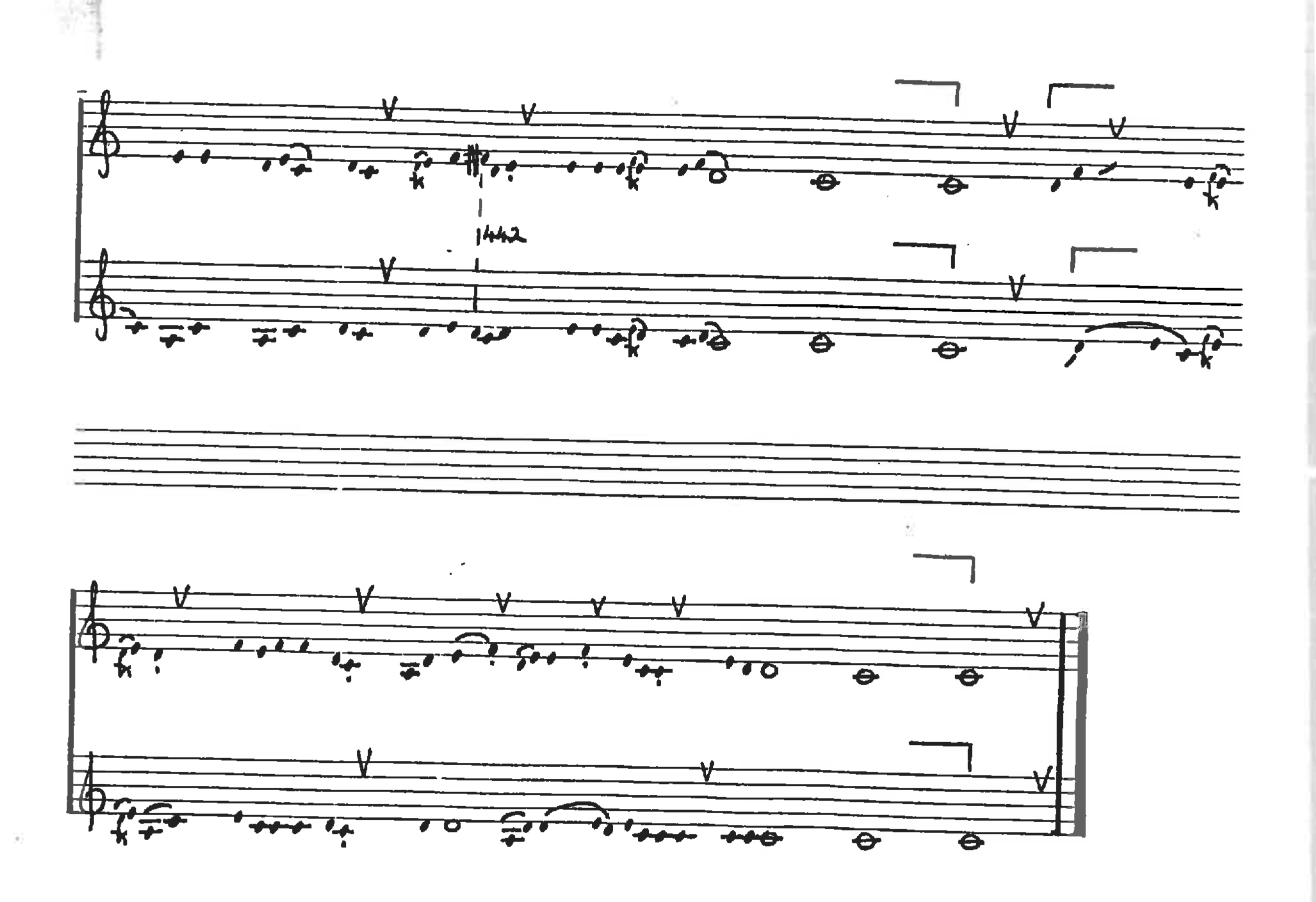
III. BUYI SONG (?) (There was no identification or spoken commentary for this song).



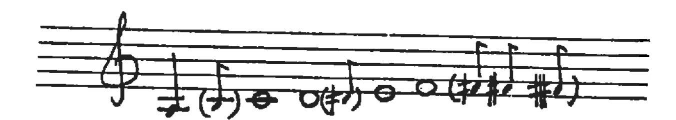
The numbers between notes indicate the number of cents of the interval.

(N.B. - each line equals approximately 20 seconds)


628
467
423
210
311
468
261



mode:



Analysis

This song is in eight phrases which are outlined in the score with square brackets. The song has a limited ambitus of a major sixth with most of the movement occuring in the range of a fourth from C - F. In sections 1 and 2 the lower voice provides a drone which moves from D to C. From section 3 onwards however it moves much more frequently to maintain a relationship with the upper voice of either a second or third or occasionally a fourth or fifth.

An analysis of the mode indicates that there are two 'versions' of the note D. Most of the time it can be perceived as a D natural but occasionally it is noticeably sharper but not as sharp as a D#. There are also several variations on the note F. Most of the time it appears as F natural but it also appears as F quarter sharp, F#, and F three quarters sharp.

Exact intervals in cents are indicated between some of the notes joined by dotted lines. It should be evident that this song fits least comfortably on the Western stave with its implied equal-tempered scale.

In sections 1 and 2 the lower voice provides a drone which moves between D and C. From section three onwards however it moves much more frequently at the interval of a second or third or occasionally a fourth or fifth with the upper voice.

IV. YI SONG

This is an example of polyphony from the Yi nationality in Yunnan province. (The Yi live in Sichuan province as well as Yunnan). The song is called Ju qiang and together with another song called Si qiang bai hua they are part of a suite of songs known as Wu san qiang (literally five - three tunes). They are songs of the Nisu who are a sub-branch of the Yi. The Nisu people live in the southern part of the Yunnan to the south of the Red River near Vietnam and the Guangxi province.

This type of song is for soloist and chorus. The solo singer has to communicate with a soloist from another group when two groups meet. Normally one group is male and the other femal, with either of the groups acting as the hosts. The size of the chorus varies from about 10 people to upwards of 100. Normally these songs are sung during the haymaking in spring and the harvesting in autumn.

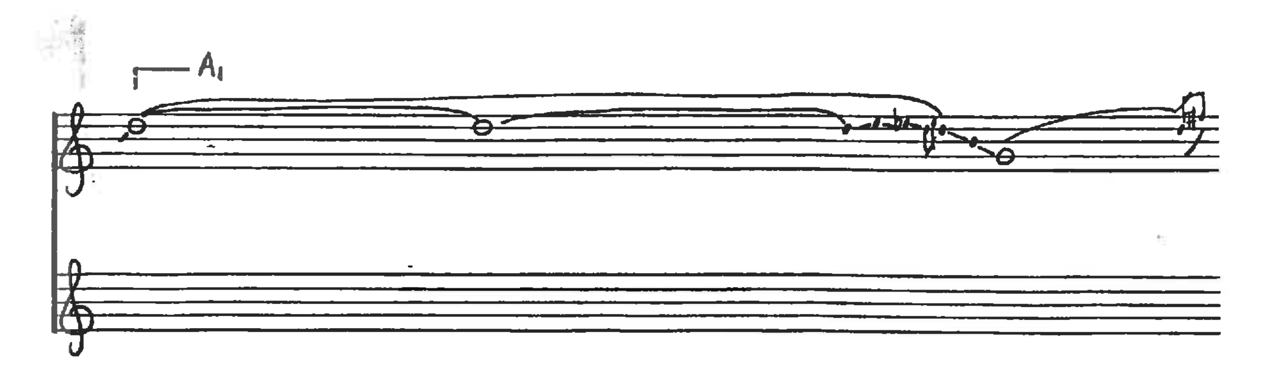
The host group must first invite the guests and then prepare the food. This normally occurs in the evening when the people have more time. The meetings of such groups is accompanied by smoking tobacco, tea drinking and eating food specially prepared for the occasion. A special bamboo pipe is used for smoking.

This kind of song has a fixed form. It is normally made up of four sentences. Each sentence has seven words and therefore there are 28 words per verse. At the commencement of these song - called Ju (literally translates as "timid") - the singers explain how their hospitality is very modest even though they have gone to great lengths in preparing the food etc. for the guests.

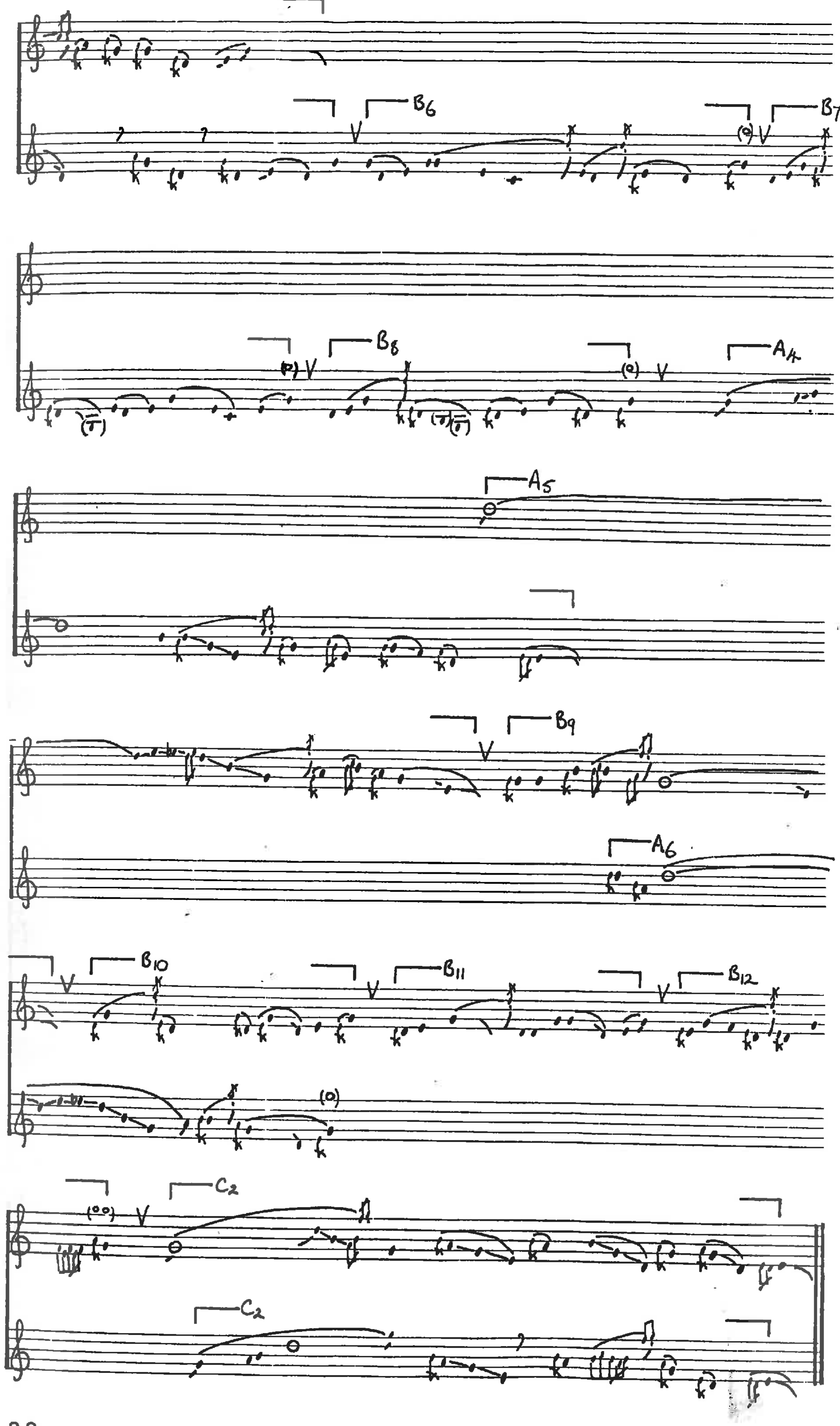
The singers 'chat' to each other via the singing. Even though the songs have a basic strophic structure of four lines the verse are greatly extended by improvisation and the adding of more words to the text. If the singers become excited they sing up to 60 or more verses. When the singers get bored they stand up and start dancing.

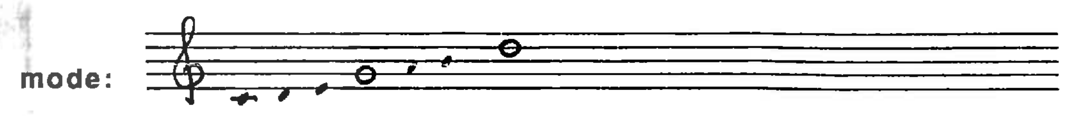
Strangers to the region have great difficulty understanding the meaning of the words. (The commentator noted that although he had lived in the Yunnan province for many years he was still baffled by the song texts.)

This song is sung by Ba Xiu-zhen and Xiang You-fen from the Dali district of the Yunnan province. It was recorded on 20 April 1982. The older singer used to be a professional singer and in the 1950's she won an award. She has been performing for over thirty years. She now lives in the countryside. The younger singer is also from the countryside. The two singers sing in the characteristic question and answer fashion.



(N.B. - each line equals approximately 15 seconds)


B6
B7
B3
B8
A4
A5
B9
A6
B10
B11
B12
C2
C2

mode: 

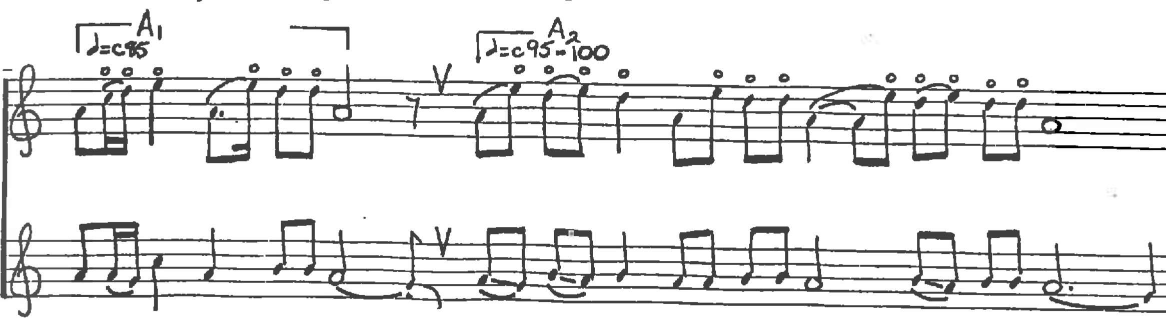
Analysis

The two voices in this song are apparently rhythmically independent. There are two types of phrases in this song, A and B. Phrase A is characterised by a long sustained D^1 at the beginning which is held from anywhere between three to eleven seconds. This sustained note is followed by a descending figure to arrive at the note G. Phrase B is centred around two notes, G and D. At two points in this song (labelled C) the singers briefly coincide rhythmically. These two sections occur in the middle and at the end of the song.

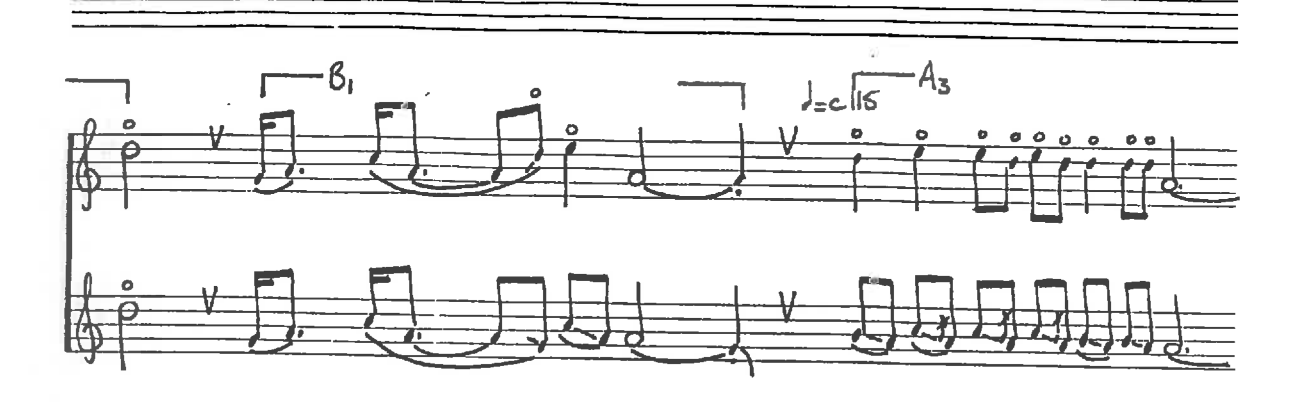
The extraordinary power of the singing in this song is enhanced by the head-tone grace-notes, indicated with an open circle above the note-head, and by the final tones which the singers 'slide off'. Both singers use these techniques. The 'tonal centres' of this song are G and D.

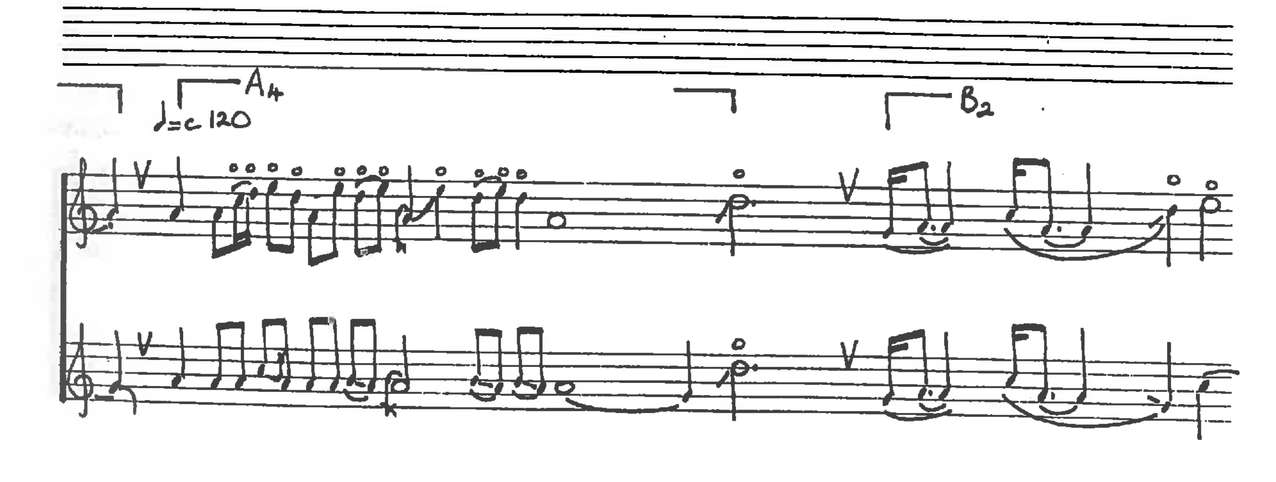
V. HUMEI SONG

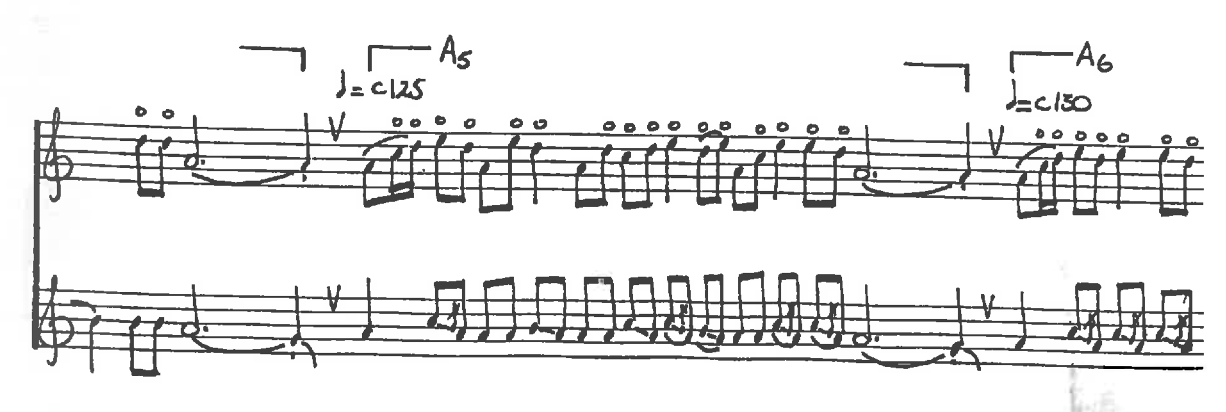
A Humei folk-song from Tianyang county in the Guangxi province entitled "We will always follow the Communist Party". The singers are Liu Mei-hong and Tan Yi-liao.



(N.B. - each line equals approximately 15 seconds)
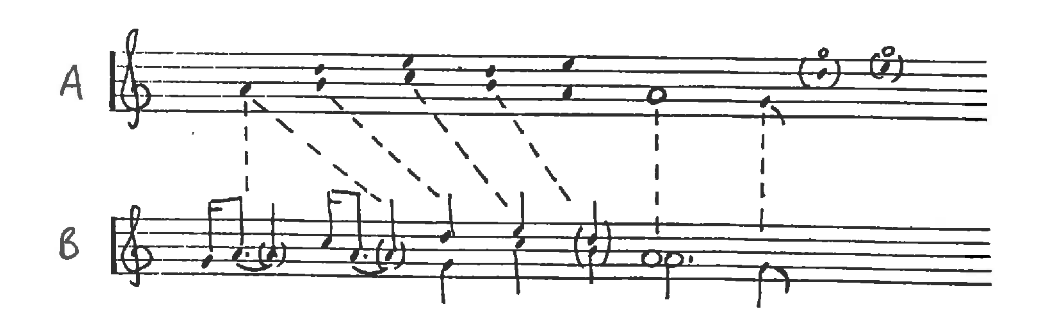






A7 ♩=c90 A8 ♩=c110-120

A9

mode:

Analysis

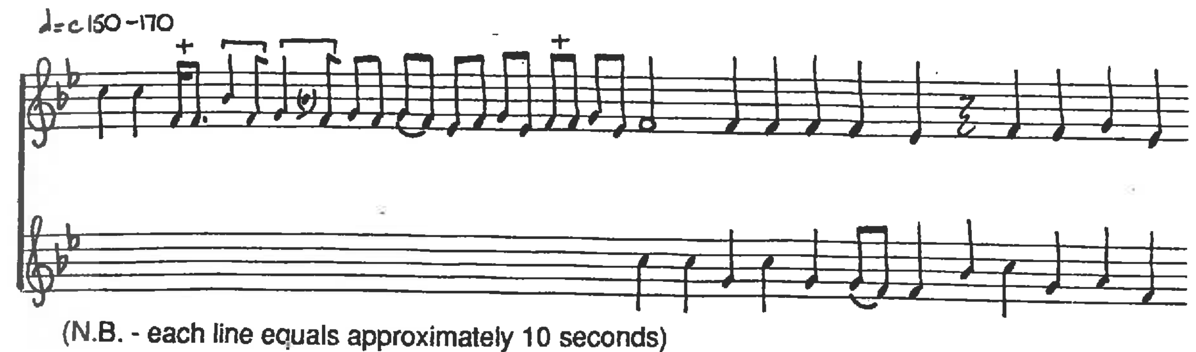


The basic melodic outline of this song is indicated by phrase A in the analysis. Phrase B, a variant of phrase A differentiated by unison grace-notes, is an 'insert' which occurs twice in the song. The upper voice uses head-tones from the note C^1 and above.

At the cadences the voices begin in unison and then separate to a second. From this the lower voice either slides down off its note to no definite pitch or both voices rise to a unison head-tone on either a D^1 or E^1.

VI. ZHUANG SONG

A two-part Zhuang song from Hecheng county, Guangzi province, entitled "My heart will always accompany the moon. It will never be separated". The singers are Wei Hua-tao and Yu Xiao-xi.



(N.B. - each line equals approximately 10 seconds)

Beats with a + above a quaver grouping could be written 3 or 5.

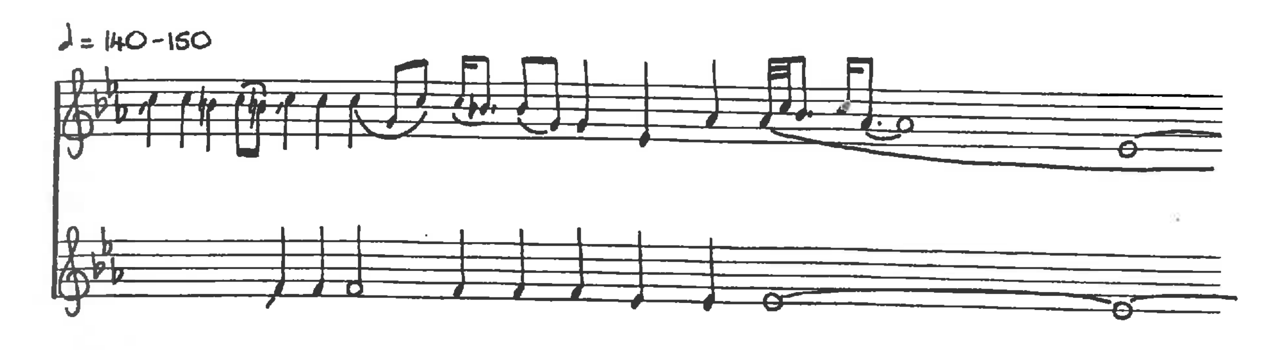
mode: 

Analysis

This song could be described as a type of imitative two-part canon. The top voice introduces each of the four sections of the song with a solo phrase which is characterized by movement around the 'tonic' note F. When the second voice enters singing an imitative phrase the first voice becomes a drone on the note F. It moves from this note to create parallel seconds with the other voice where there otherwise a unison might have resulted. The 'cadential figure' consists of two parallel seconds on Eflat/F and F/G followed by a strong sustained F.

VII. MULAO SONG

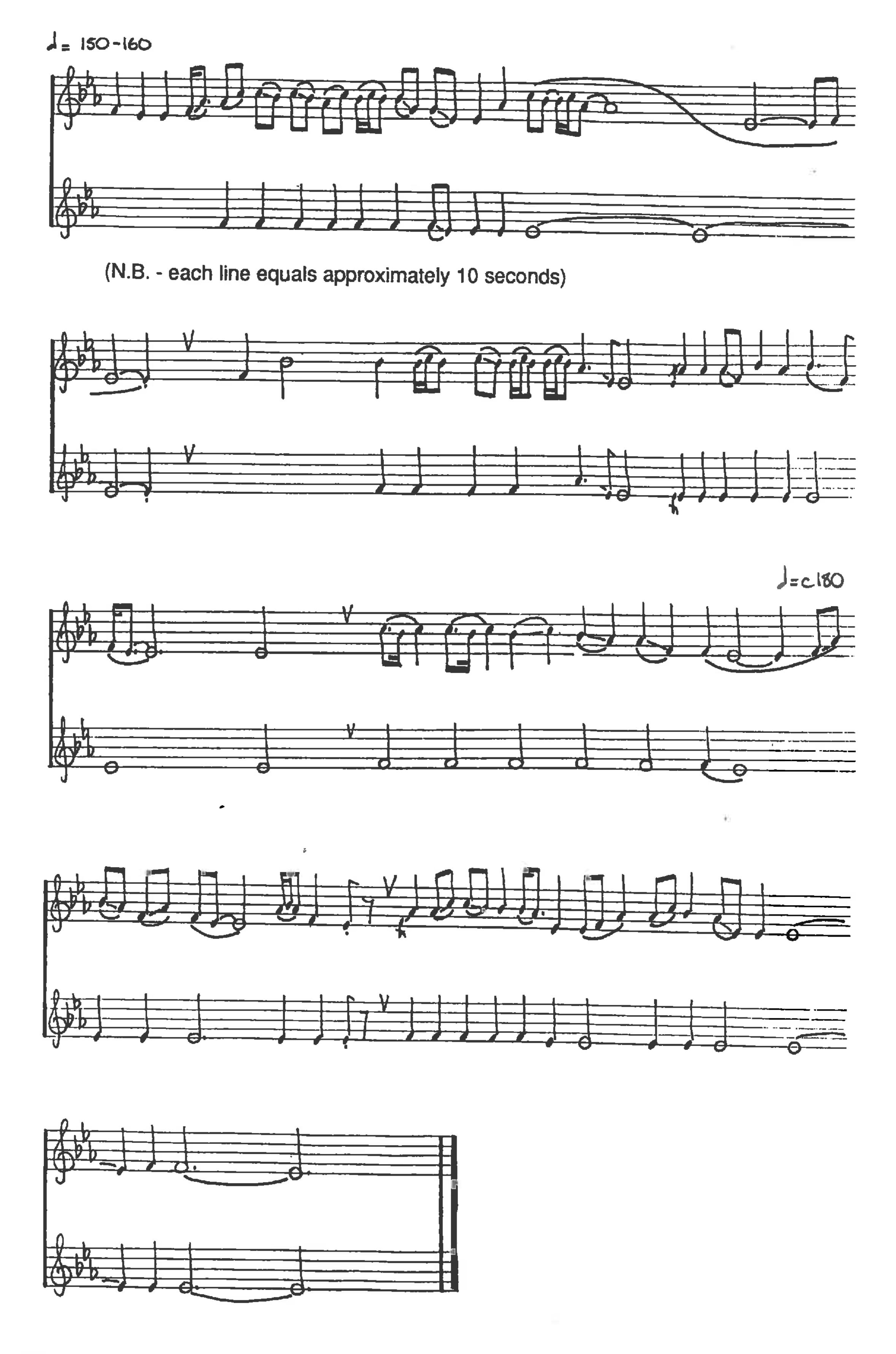
A Mulao song from Luocheng county, Guangxi province. The performance style is called "A Four Seasons Tune" and the title of the song is "Together we must cultivate civilised habits and our civilisation will flower". The singers are Luo Cui-xiang and Wu Xi-zhi.



(N.B. - each line equals approximately 10 seconds)

VIII. MULAO SONG
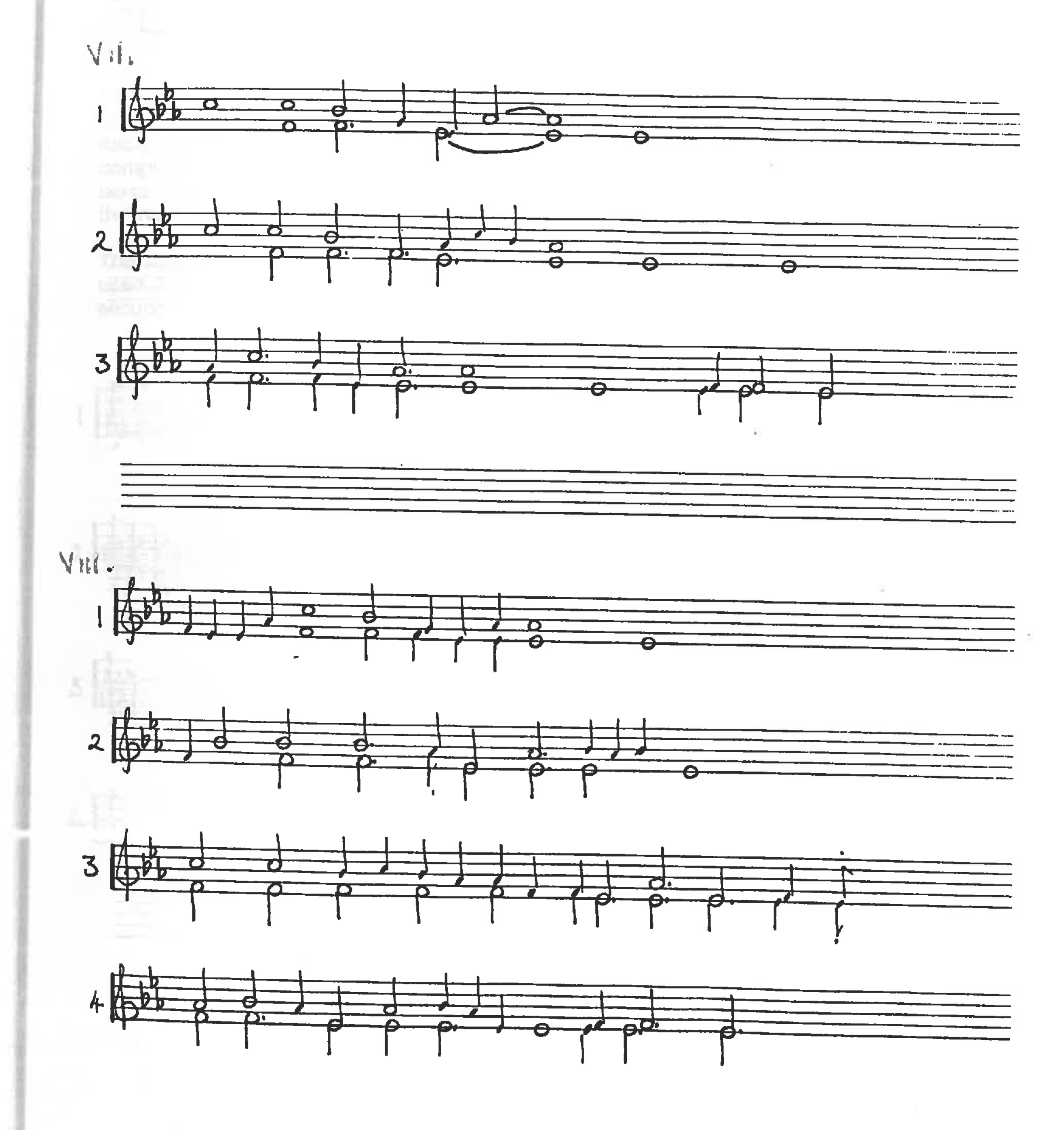
A Mulao song from the Luocheng county, Guangxi province entitled "It is hard to eat even the food in your mouth". The performance style is called "Tune of Seven Sentences". The singers are the same as No. VII.



mode:

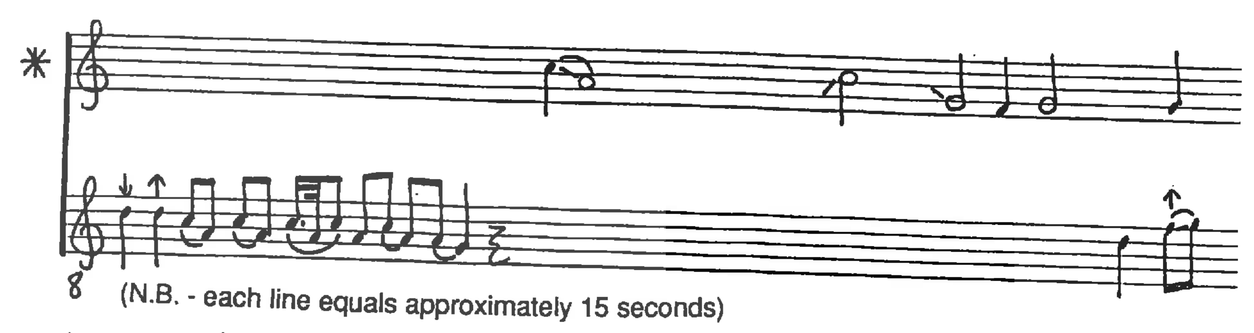
Analysis of songs VII and VIII

Songs nos. VII and VIII are very similar. Both songs use Eflat as a 'tonic' and the most frequent interval is the fourth. Intervals of a fifth, third and second also occur between the voices. Song VII has three sections or stanzas and song VIII has four. The cadential figures used in these songs are identical. They are either based around a long, sustained unison Eflat with the top voice 'flicking off' this note briefly or moving to a longer sustained second Eflat/F before returning to a unison Eflat.
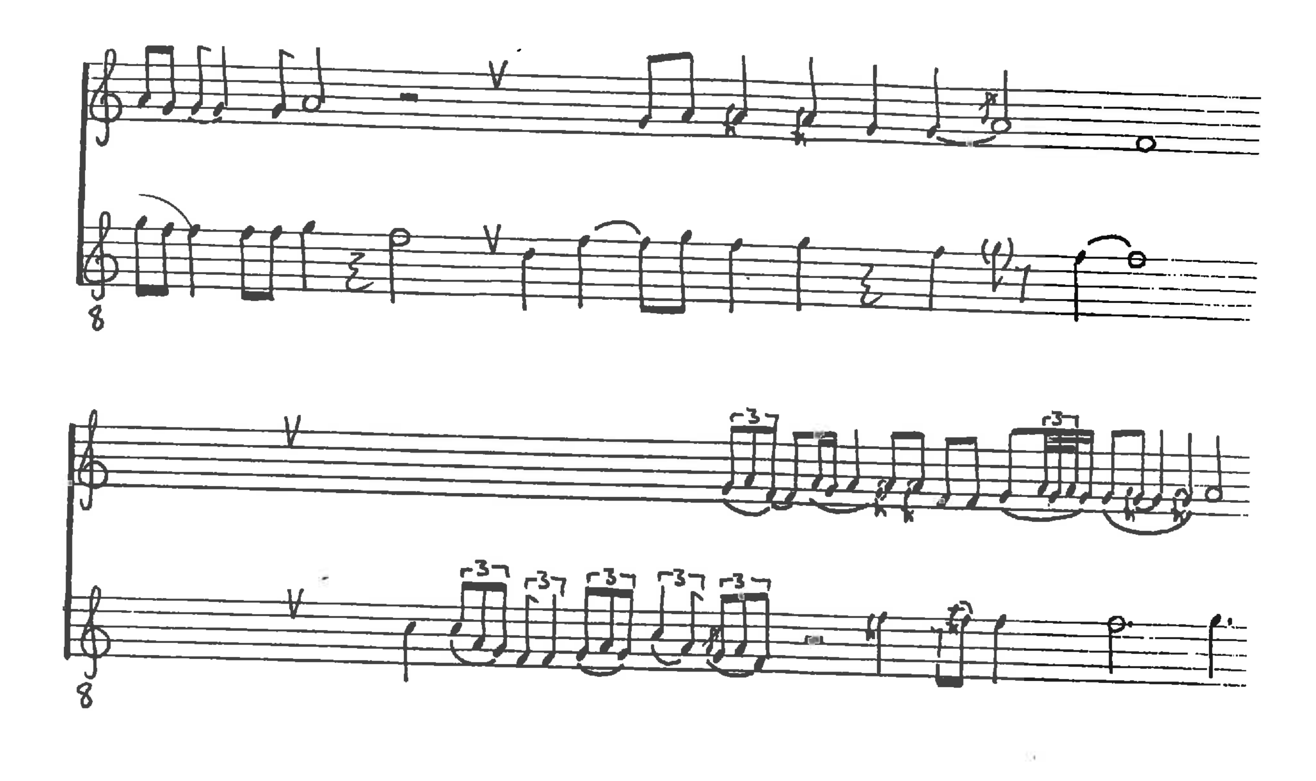


IX. YAO SONG
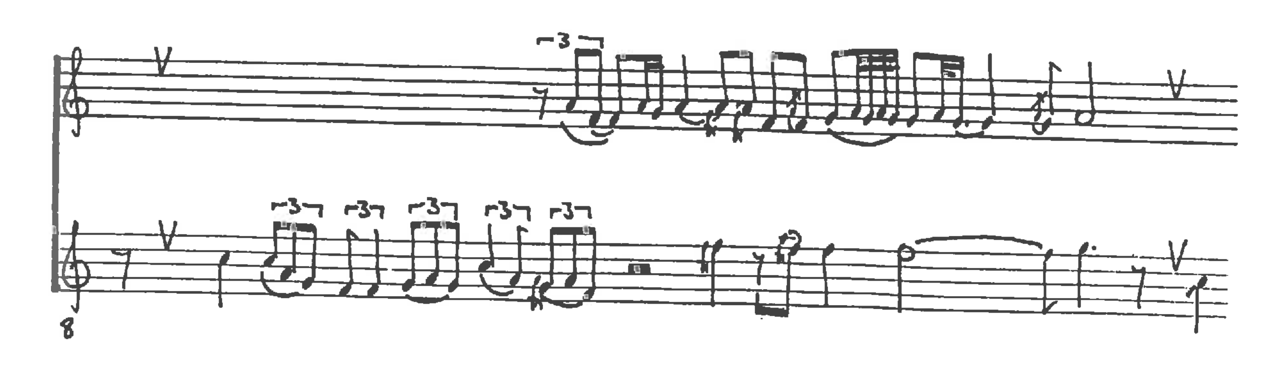
A two part Yao song from the Dong'an county, Guangxi province. The performance style is called "Tune for Young People". The actual title is undecipherable. The singers are Lan Bing-he and Meng Mei-ling.



(N.B. - each line equals approximately 15 seconds)

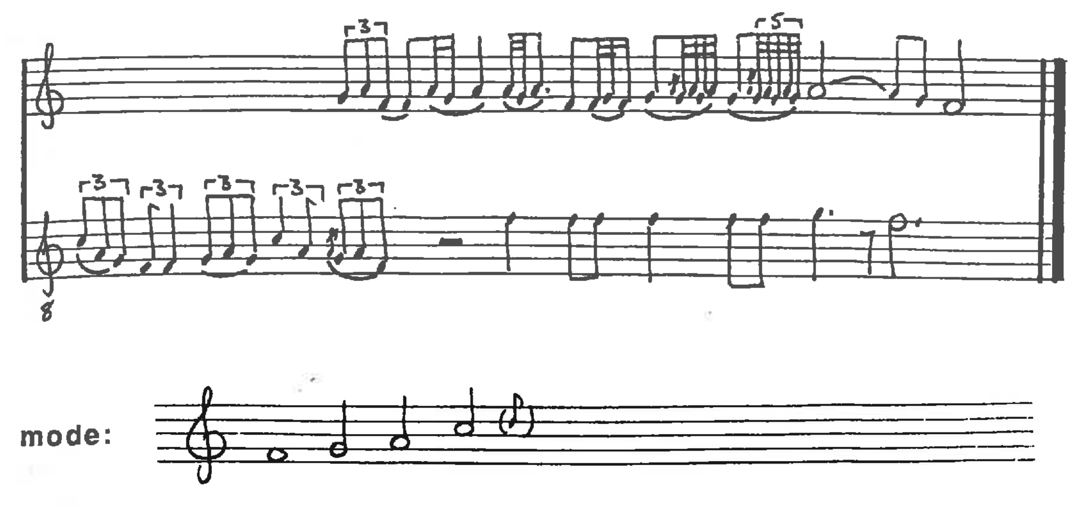
* N.B. The top voice is consistently between 20-50 cents flat relative to the lower voice except for the note F which is in perfect unison.







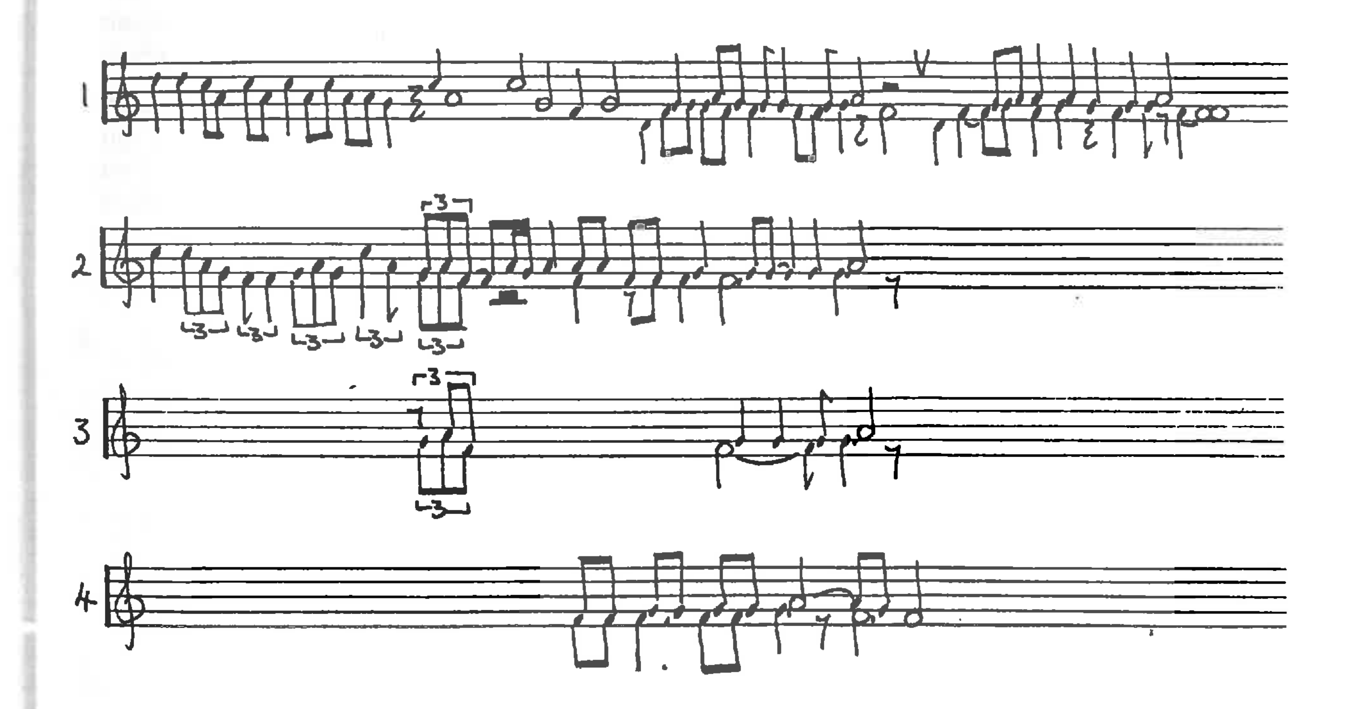




Analysis

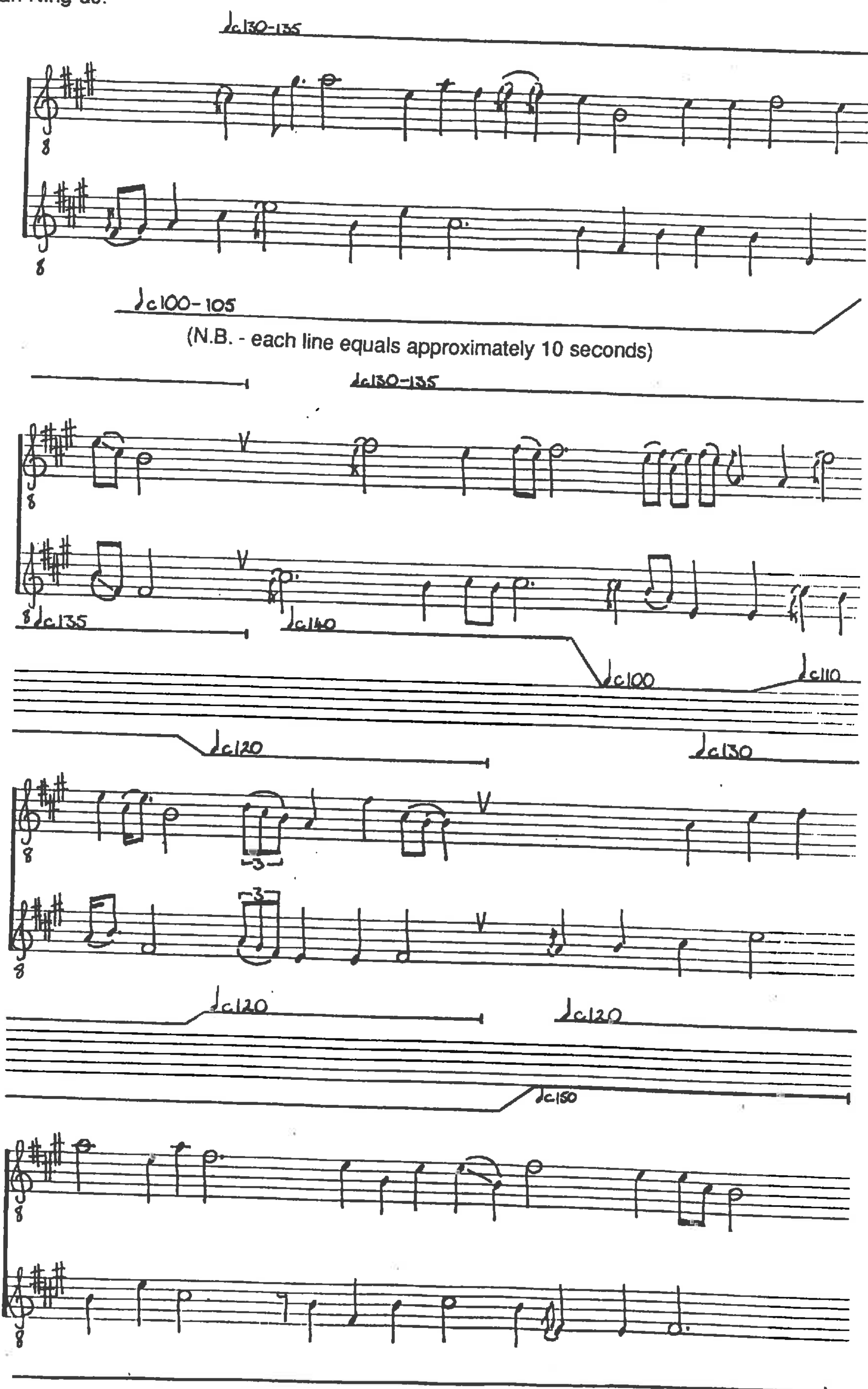
This song presented a major problem for notation using the Western stave and its implied equal tempered scale. The top voice sounds consistently 20-50 cents 'flat' with respect to the lower voice except for the note F which is in perfect unison. The solution adopted removes much of the complicating detail that would have resulted if every intervallic relationship had been indicated in cents. Listeners will readily perceive the intervals between the voices as narrower than suggested by the notation.

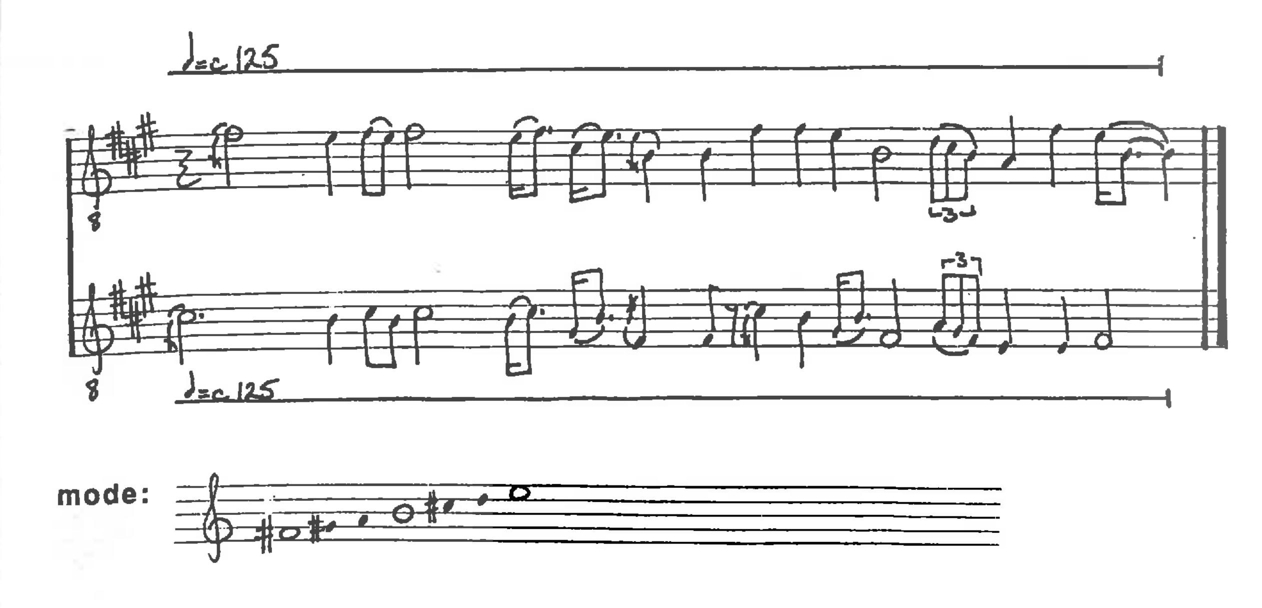
The song has four sections of which 2, 3 and 4 are almost identical. Two types of 'cadential figure' are used. The first consists of two parallel seconds F/G to G/A which occurs in phrases 2 and 3. The second is a second G/A followed by a unison F.



X. SHE SONG

A She song to greet a bride from the eastern part of Fujian region. The singers are Zhong Shi-fu and Lan Ning-de.





mode:
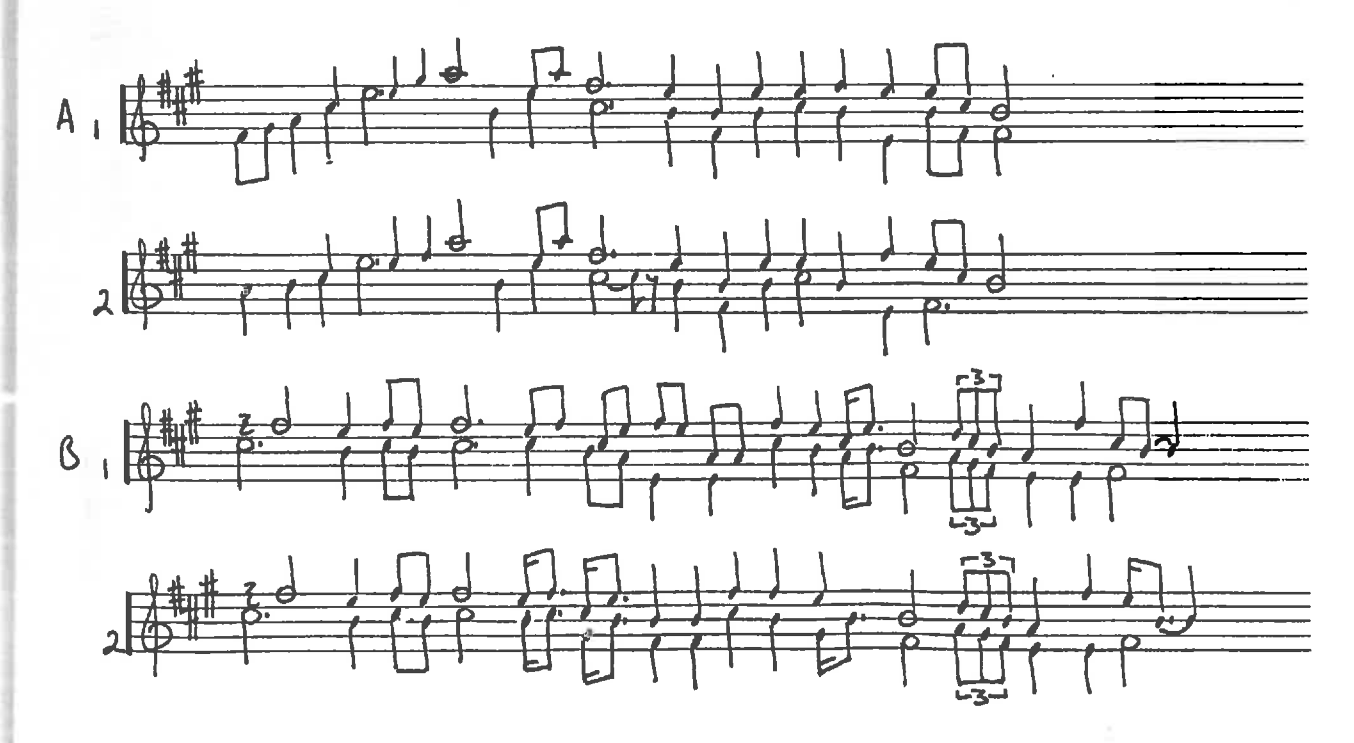
Analysis

In this song the two voices for the most part are moving at independent tempi. There is some rhythmic synchronisation at the cadences of the first three sections and in the whole of the last phrase.

In the analysis I have ignored the rhythmic differences that exist between the voices in order to show that they are basically moving in parallel fourths. In the performance this parallelism is lost through the independent tempi of the parts.

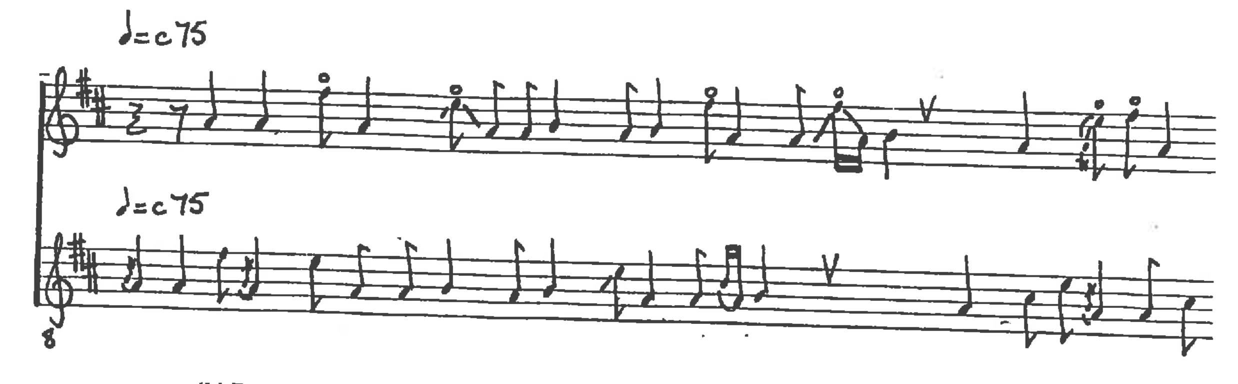
There are two types of two-voiced phrase, A and B. Phrase A is characterized by the 'canonic' entry of the voices which then move in parallel whereas in phrase B the voices are moving in parallel from the start.

One could speculate that the two voices were supposed to be coincident for the whole song and that this is a "deviant" performance. Against this however is the fact that the singers coincide at the end of the first phrase but they then return to their independent tempi in phrases two and three. This suggests that the rhythmic asyncronisation is intentional.

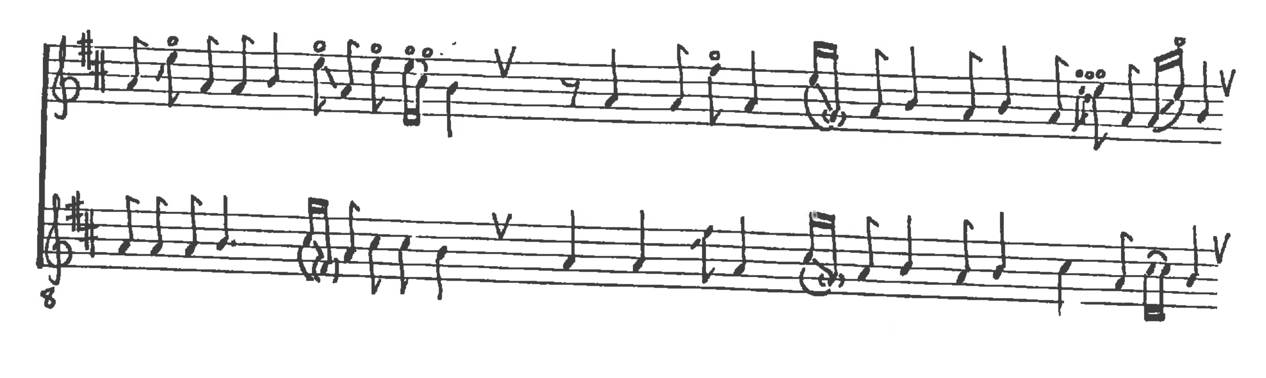


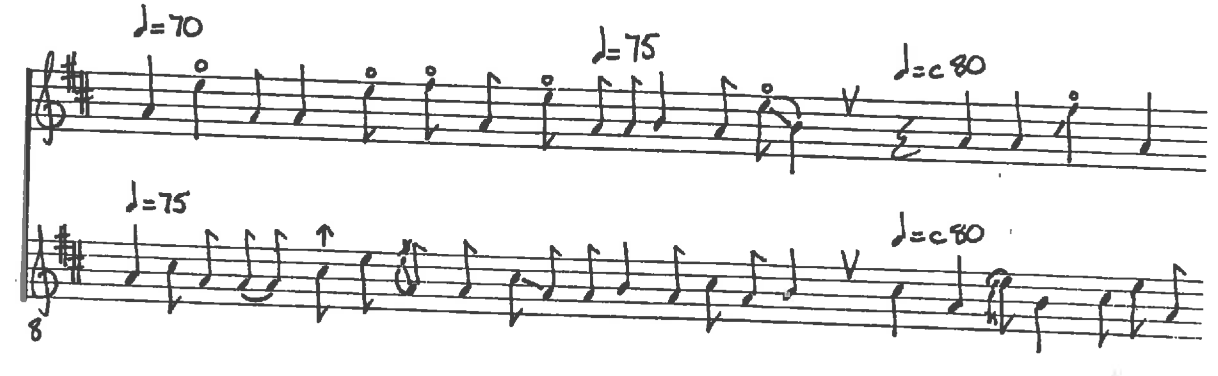
XI. SHE SONG
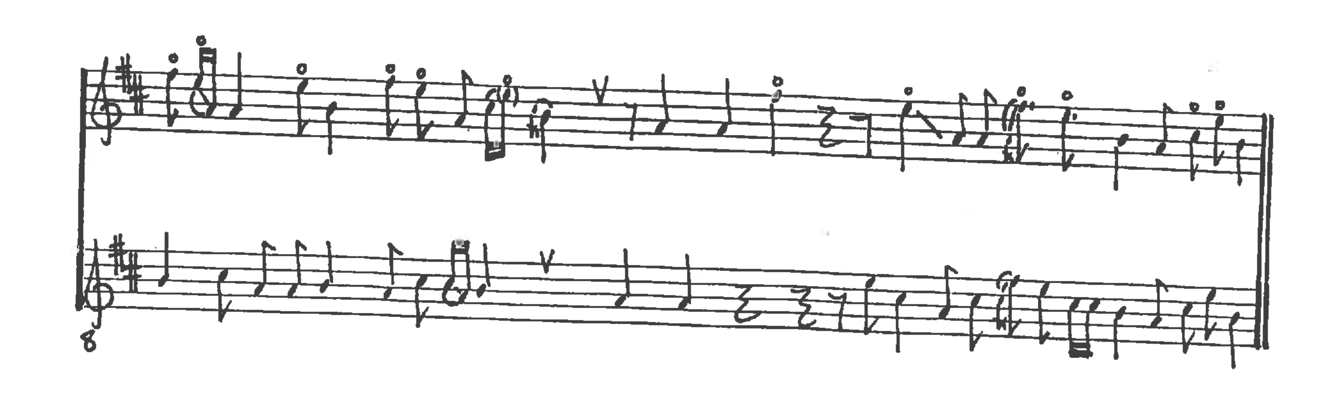
A She song from eastern part of Fujian region. This type of song is called a 'Ten words tune', and the singers are Zhong Shi-fu and Lei Ning-xiang.



(N.B. - each line equals approximately 15 seconds)







:nd the





Analysis

This song is from the same nationality and area as the previous song. Again, the most noticeable feature is the non-synchronised rhythmic relationship between the voices. The two parts are moving in canon but at an unusual and varying time interval.

The top voice uses head-tones for the notes E^1 and F^1. One interesting feature of this song is that each phrase starts on the apparent 'tonic' of the mode, A, and cadences on the 'supertonic', B.



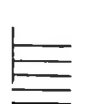


The following six songs included on the tape are not transcribed.
Except for No.XVI there is no documentation available on them.

XII. YAO SONG(?)

XIII. YAO SONG(?)

XIV. YAO SONG(?)



XV. YAO SONG(?)

XVI. ZHUANG SONG A song for a good rice harvest.

XVII. YAO SONG(?)



